

A GOD NAMED SMITH — He Created A Universe

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JULY 1957 VOL. 31 NO. 7

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the Observatory

BY THE EDITOR

- The legal advisers of the American Society have warned them that they'd better get going on a code of space ethics; a blue-print governing territorial rights in the stellar reaches.

Now this is a mighty laudable project but unless we start applying more skill to the practice of "live and let live" before we get out there, it's not going to amount to much.

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—PWF

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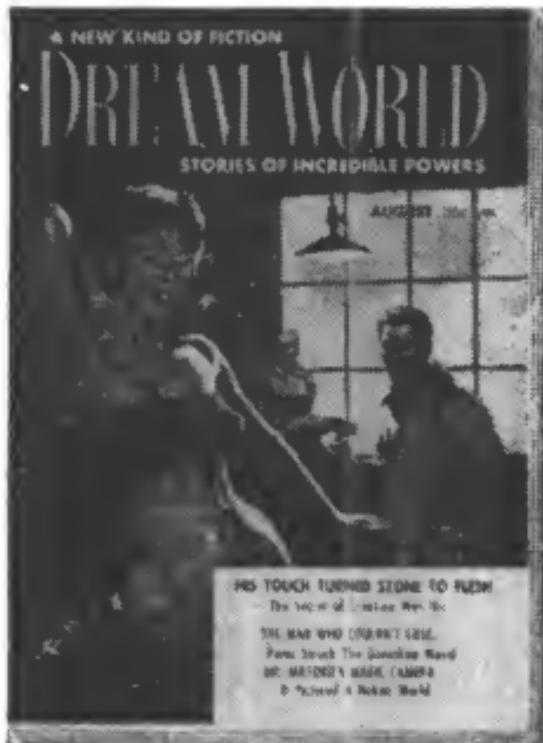
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HIS TOUCH TURNED STONE TO FLESH!



THE SECRET OF LIFE WAS HIS

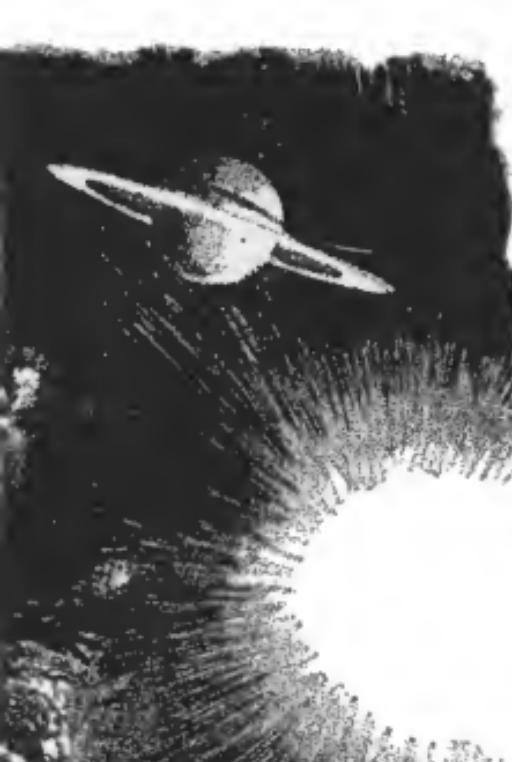
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If the universe is a dream of God,



A GOD NAMED SMITH

By HENRY SLESAR

"What Man can imagine, Man can do." A sublime premise indeed, but Smith thought of an even more staggering one. "What God can imagine, Man can do," he said. God built a universe. Could Smith do the same?



HE HAD a first name when I met him. He wasn't just Smith; he was Robert Smith or Ronald Smith, something like that. But in the incredible years that followed our first meeting, his Christian name was either lost or buried, and he became simply Smith. Not Smith, the Man. Just Smith. Smith, the God.

A thousand reporters have poised their pencils at me and asked about that meeting. I told them the same story every time.

"Well, there wasn't much to it," I'd say. "We were students at Ardmore University.

cannot Man have a similar dream?

He was the Boy Wonder, of course, only thirteen years old, and I was a sophomore of nineteen. But we hit it off okay, and became good friends. That's all there was to it."

That's what I used to say. It wasn't much, and it never made headlines. But I was shy of talking about Smith in those days. Now things are different. Now I have to talk, or the Smith-facts that have piled up inside me will blow up in some spontaneous eruption, and me along with it. I have to talk, even though there's a thin and icy voice in the back of my brain that says, "Keep your silence, Luke. Smith isn't dead. You can't kill Smith."

I was a sophomore, and I was no different from a hundred other wise-eyed young men at Ardmore University. We dressed the same way, did the same things, shared the same beliefs. Naturally, we were fashionable atheists. The only kind of Hell we believed in was the kind we could raise at frat parties. The only kind of Heaven we cared about was the kind that involved a bottle of 100 proof Irish and an obliging coed. We could quote you Voltaire and Shaw and Joyce and

Nietzsche. We thought the world was our oyster, but we were cynical about finding pearls in it.

I met Smith on one of my Hangover Days.

I was sprawled out on the cot in my room at the Psi Gamma House, clutching a No Parking sign to my chest, still wearing my best blue serge from last night's binge. It was Sunday, and I was content to sleep until Monday's classes. But I didn't. I began to sense that somebody was looking at me, so I pulled my eyelashes apart and peered out through the scarlet mist. A figure took shape.

"Pardon me," Smith said. "Is this Mr. Wingate's room?"

My eyes widened a little. Smith was something I didn't expect. He was a long-headed kid about twelve or thirteen, with a sad mouth and half-closed eyes and hair the color of dry straw. He was carrying a suitcase that was putting a strain on his thin arms and shoulders.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," the kid said. "But I was told to come up here. My name is Smith."

I groaned and struggled to an approximation of sitting position. I said: "Look, kiddo, didn't your mother teach you

manners? Be a good boy and blow."

He stiffened, and his eyelids flew open. I found myself looking into twin caverns. Even in my sorry state, the sight of Smith's dark and empty eyes made me shiver. I said: "I'm Wingate, son. What can I do for you?"

"I don't know." He looked around the room uncertainly. "A fellow named Curtis told me to come here, see you about something."

"Curtis?" Gil Curtis was a barrel-chested senior, the class clown. It didn't take a slide-rule to determine what had happened. It was a Curtis special, the old left-handed monkey wrench, the striped paint, the phoney errand. Only why the hell was Curtis picking on kids?

Then Smith explained. "It's my first semester here. I've been transferred from Crowley."

I pushed aside the No Parking sign on my bed. "Now I gotcha," I said. "You're the boy prodigy they've been talking about. Did Curtis maybe mention a left-handed monkey wrench?"

"Something like that."

"You're being ribbed, Smith. Curtis is Society's Funniest Man. He knew I was blacked out here, so he sent

you up. You wouldn't have an aspirin in that carpetbag?"

Smith shook his head, and his tight lips made his pale face look smaller.

"I don't see what's so funny," he said.

"Neither do I. But no harm done." I looked at him with interest. "How old are you, Smith?"

"Thirteen."

"You must be a pretty bright boy. That oughta make you the youngest freshman they ever had at Ardmore."

"No, it doesn't." Smith turned towards the door. "I'm a senior." There was more than a tinge of superiority in his tone.

I didn't see Smith for a couple of weeks after that, until pledging time rolled around. We had a typically unparliamentary meeting in the frat house, and somebody mentioned his name as a candidate, half-serious, half-joking. Somebody said:

"You'll have to admit he's a novelty. And he's got brains. We could use a few brains around this dump."

"Why'd he leave Crowley College?" I asked. "And in his senior year?"

"Dunno. Some kind of trouble or other."

"Nuts," Gil Curtis said. "We don't want any runny-

nosed kid around here. I say no."

We put it to a vote, and there was a limp raising of hands on the issue. For some perverse reason, I voted to pledge Smith. But I was the only one.

That same afternoon, I had the bad fortune to be walking in the same direction as Gil Curtis. He was loud-mouthed and clownish as usual as he strolled beside me, and when he spotted the frail form of Smith coming in the other direction, his eyes lit up.

"Hey, here comes the egg-head."

"Lay off," I growled. But it was too late; Curtis put out a beefy hand and laid it on Smith's small flat chest, blocking his path.

"Hey, junior," he said. "How's the left-handed monkey wrench coming?"

Smith looked at him without blinking. "I think I've found one all right. I'm staying at the Ivy House, if you'd care to take a look at it."

Curtis smothered a guffaw. "Sure, Junior, let's have a peek. You coming, Luke?"

I said yes, and the three of us cut across the campus towards the auxiliary dormitory building that had been

added to the University structures with the increased enrollment. Smith had a small, bare room on the third floor, and it looked even more cramped due to a conglomeration of electronic apparatus he had brought with him from Crowley. I surveyed the confused mass of equipment, and recalled hearing that Smith was some kind of scientific prodigy. I was a journalism student myself, and any gadget more complex than an electric razor made me want to lie down with a cold compress on my head.

Smith threaded his way through the junk, and picked up a shiny-new wrench from some canvas-covered object in the corner. He handed it to Curtis, and the buffoon took it in his right hand, an uncertain sneer on his face.

"Very funny," he said, hefting the tool. "You're not just a genius, you're a real comedian."

"Try it," the kid said coldly. He handed Curtis a large nut and bolt. "Take this apart. If you can."

I watched Curtis grab the nut-and-bolt from the kid's hand and apply the wrench. No matter how he twisted, the nut wouldn't turn. Finally, he took it off by hand and examined the screw-thread.

"It's not the thread," Smith said. "The thread is right-handed. It's the wrench that's left-handed."

"A real comedian," Curtis muttered. But no matter how he tried, he couldn't remove the nut. His fleshy face began to redden, and his neck swelled.

Smith said: "I guess you didn't understand me, Mr. Curtis. It's a left-handed monkey wrench. That means you have to use your left hand."

Curtis glared, and switched the wrench to his other hand. When he applied it to the nut, it slipped easily off the bolt. He stared at the pieces in his hand, cursed, and threw everything on the bed. Then he stalked out.

I stayed behind, and watched the kid pick up his tool and put it away. Then he started fooling with his electronic set-up. There wasn't much expression on his face, not even a small glow of triumph. I said: "What kind of a trick was that?"

"Simple," he shrugged. "I just sent an ordinary wrench through a Moebius-warp. It came back in a left-handed molecular arrangement."

"Are you kidding?"

He stopped fussing, and turned his dark, empty eyes

in my direction. There was a frozen hardness in his face that had nothing to do with his young age.

"Why should I kid you?" he said tonelessly.

"No reason." I shrugged and went to the door. Something made me turn back and say: "I hope you like it here, Smith."

It's hard to say whether the monkey-wrench episode was the beginning of the friendship between Smith and myself. It was a juiceless relationship; Smith wasn't somebody you could warm up to. We spent time together after class, and once in a while we'd go down to the coffee shop and talk. That is, Smith talked. Not about himself, but about the work he was doing, his studies, his plans for future research. It didn't take long to get the impression that there was contempt in Smith's attitude towards his instructors, and I began to realize that the student-teacher roles were hopelessly disjointed. Smith knew more about physics, mathematics, cosmology, and practically every other science than anybody on the staff, and there was an atmosphere of despair among the faculty.

Before long, I realized that

my friendship with Smith was costing me the friendship of virtually every other student. I guess I was always an outgoing kind of personality, and it was hard for me to believe that I wasn't wanted in any society. But that truth was spelled out for me clearly. Especially when my own fraternity brothers sent a delegation to tell me my status. Curtis was the ring-leader and spokesman, and he put the case bluntly. Stop hanging around Smith, or quit the fraternity. I got hot-headed at the crude proposition, and told them all to perform a freak biological act. Then I stormed up to my room and packed my bags.

That was how Smith and I got to share a room at Ivy House. And that was how I discovered the Bible.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and Smith had taken the train into the city to attend some scientific symposium or other. I was in my favorite position, horizontal, on the bed, having a cozy dream about a redhead. I woke up around two, and drifted around the room with the vague idea of reading a book. Usually, I passed up the books on Smith's shelf, having little interest in the

jawbreaker titles that lined it. But this time, I looked, and with some surprise, spotted a dogeared edition of the Old Testament. I lifted it out, and opened the first cover. There was an Ex Libra stamp that said: "TO OUR CHAMPION BIBLE STUDENT, FROM REV. HARLOW MOORE."

The first page read: "*The Holy Bible, translated out of the original tongues in the year of our Lord MDCXI.*"

I flipped the pages of dedication to King James. When I came to the First Book of Moses called Genesis, my eyes went wide as I saw the pencilled corrections on the text. Reading with Smith's changes, the first paragraph read:

"In the beginning Smith created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of Smith moved upon the face of the waters. And Smith said, Let there be light; and there was light . . ."

I have to admit it. Atheist as I professed to be, the sight of that altered page turned me cold and fearful. I looked out of the window as if expecting to see God's revengeful lightning crackling over

the peaceful campus of Ardmore University. The fact that Smith had rewritten God out of the Bible seemed like the ultimate blasphemy, and I felt as if my very reading of Smith's revisions had entangled me inextricably with Smith's own brand of damnation.

"And Smith said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And Smith made the firmament . . ."

I closed the book and put it back on the shelf. Then I hurried back to the bed and sat down.

Was it some kind of prank? I shook my head. If anything, Smith was humorless. Perhaps it was some kind of twisted vengeance Smith was taking upon the world; maybe it was a simple case of childish rebellion over a restricted childhood. Maybe he'd been tormented by fanatical parents, driven into a religious scholasticism which he had secretly hated. The explanation seemed logical, but I couldn't let it go at that. I had to know more.

So I asked Smith.

He returned from the city at eight that evening, his small face showing that pe-

culiar exhalation that any scientific conversation produced in him. When I made a casual reference to the altered Bible, his features froze again.

"Don't mess with my things, Luke. I've asked you before."

I displayed some of my famous temper, and slammed out of the room.

I spent a couple of hours getting solitary drunk. When I returned to Ivy House, I was singing a hymn at the top of my lungs. Nobody heard it; the students were all at frat parties or in town. Nobody but Smith.

He said: "Luke, I want to show you something."

"Show me what?"

"Something to do with that Bible you saw. I've thought about showing you for sometime, but I didn't know if you could keep the secret."

"Say, listen—" I said thickly.

"Never mind. Just look at this."

He walked to the corner of the room, towards the large object that remained covered by canvas. He whipped off the concealing cloth, and I saw that the object underneath was a tall cabinet about the height of a man, and four feet wide, the top

half glass-enclosed, the bottom half studded with dials and switches.

"What's that?" I said.
"Looks like some kinda coffin—"

"Just the reverse," Smith said. "Things are born here, not buried. Would you like to see it work?"

I shuffled up to it and pressed my nose against the glass. "Don't see nothin'. What's it do?"

Smith started to fool with the controls. The thing emitted a low-pitched whine. Otherwise, nothing happened.

"The glass encloses a group of noncondensable gases," Smith said. "Like hydrogen, and helium. There are dust particles, too, like water, iron oxides, ice crystals, silicon compounds. You can't see them now, but they're there, just as they might form within the rotating envelope of the sun. This device is activating those gases and particles at enormous speed, causing them to collide. They're being mutually exploded by each other, but are also becoming imbedded with each other's mass. Within a few minutes, you'll see them aggregate until the mass is visible to the naked eye."

My naked eye wasn't see-

ing so well, but I continued to peer through the glass. After five minutes, I thought I could see the pinpoint of something in the center of the cabinet. I blinked at it, and saw it grow larger. Before another ten minutes had gone by, I saw the pinpoint enlarge into a ball almost an eighth of an inch in circumference.

"What the hell is it?" I said.

"It's a world," Smith answered.

"A what?"

"A small planet. A very small planet, created out of an artificial cosmos. Right now, its heat intensity is almost great enough to shatter the retaining glass. So we'll have to start the cooling process."

He tugged at a switch on the panel, and I saw his small face go white.

"What's wrong?"

"The refrigeration switch is jammed. Something's wrong."

"Can't you fix it?"

"There isn't any time—"

I put my hand over his small fingers and tried to help, but even our combined strengths didn't do any good. I suddenly realized that Smith's anxiety was serious;

I'd never seen so much emotion on his face.

"Still growing," I said, looking into the cabinet. I put my hand on the glass and yanked it away. "Ouch! The damned thing is hot."

"We'll have to do something!" Smith's eyes were wild. Right then, he seemed like nothing more than a frightened kid. "If we don't stop the process—"

"Hey! Is this thing dangerous?"

"Get out of here!" Smith screamed at me. "Warn them! Get them out of the building!"

I hesitated. "There's nobody in the building. Just us."

"Then get out of here, Luke! There isn't much time—"

I took one look at the cabinet glass, and saw it begin to glow ugly white. "How about you?"

"I've got to try—"

"Nuts to that," I said, and put my arms around Smith's narrow waist, yanking him off the controls. He began to kick at me, screaming shrilly, while I tried to drag him towards the door. There was a hum in the cabinet that seemed to be coming from the expanding, spinning speck inside the glass, and I could

actually feel the room growing warmer.

"Let me down!" he screamed. "Let me down, Luke!"

"Sorry, pal." There was unusual strength in his scrawny frame, and I remembered something I'd learned in swimming class. I cocked my right arm and let go a short, snappy punch to the kid's chin. He sagged unconsciously into my arms, and I hoisted his light body over my shoulder. Then, with one backward look at the menacingly glowing gadget in the room, I headed out the door and down the stairs.

I was halfway across the campus when Ivy House was destroyed, in a shattering explosion that knocked out windows in the village twelve miles away.

The story of Smith's expulsion from Ardmore University is well known, and there's nothing I can add that can't be found in the newspaper accounts. The feature writers really had a field day with the item, no matter how hard the Ardmore faculty tried to put a clamp on the details. It was one of the standard silly season stories newsmen rely on: the scientist fooling around his homemade laboratory and blowing

up the building. It was good for a chuckle on a lazy Sunday afternoon, and it served to confirm the popular notion that scientists, as a class, were a pretty dunderheaded lot.

It was on the day of Smith's departure from the Ardmore railway station that I first learned any facts concerning Smith's childhood. I helped him carry his bags to the train, but the 6:42 arrived late, and we got to talking.

His father had died when he was three, and his mother had been a solid, God-fearing woman who was frightened by her son's precocious abilities, and thought that a heavy dose of religious training would perhaps balance his intense interest in the sciences. His only contribution to that training had been his astonishing feat of learning the Bible, Old Testament and New, by rote, word for word. Thus the award from Reverend Harlow Moore. Then his mother had been killed in an air crash, and an uncle named Howard Cherney had been appointed Smith's guardian. Cherney had no qualms about Smith's genius; he immediately arranged for his formal education, and witnessed Smith's incredible

progress through every school grade, leading to his enrollment, at the age of ten, in Crowley College.

Smith stopped reminiscing at this point, as if reluctant to reveal the reason why he had transferred to Ardmore in his senior year. But it was obvious that he had run into similar troubles at Crowley.

When the train pulled in, Smith turned to me and said:

"I haven't thanked you, Luke. I want to now."

"What for?"

"For my life, of course. My life is very important to me. Important to you, too, for that matter."

I gagged a little at that speech, but swallowed hard and stuck out my hand.

"Lots of luck, kid," I said. "And take it easy on the world-building."

"I'll know better next time," Smith said.

He got on the train, a pathetic and fragile little figure, toting a bag too heavy for him. I didn't see him again for six years, and when I did, he was well on his way to becoming Smith, the God.

On graduation from the University, I talked my way into a cub's job on the *Times-Express*. It was a nice little

plum, and there were forty guys in my graduating class that were keening for the opportunity. I must admit that I used my association with Smith to develop the lead. My first contribution was a series of articles about Smith, that rapidly developed into a popular series concerning other "wild-eyed" scientists. I knew I was feeding a myth, but my conscience didn't trouble me. I was a reporter; that was all that mattered.

After a while, the series ran its course, and I settled down into the real drudgery of newspaper work. It was three years before I could call myself a full-fledged reporter, and even then my assignments were on the minor side. I didn't earn a byline until my fifth year on the job, but when I did, you can be sure my circle of friends knew all about it.

Among those friends was Evelyn.

Evelyn was a fresh-faced kid only a couple of years my junior, and sassy as they come. Young as she was, Evelyn was already an accomplished actress, with two fat stage roles behind her. I guess I was attracted by the facts of her success more than her beauty; that came later. She had a lovely, imp-

ish face, wore her golden hair mannishly short, and had a star-quality in her eyes, a brightness that made heads turn in the street. I think Evelyn knew that I wasn't such a big-shot journalist as I pretended to be, but she also didn't care.

It was Evelyn who brought Smith back into my life, quite accidentally. I had been dating her casually, so had no real reason to take offense at meeting her with somebody else draped on her arm. But somehow, my temper got triggered when I saw her strolling into a restaurant with a man more than twice her age.

I called on her the next day, and began to ask questions.

"None of your business," she said, curling up on the sofa and looking mischievous. "I like older men. They have an air."

"They have an air, all right. And it smells like money, I'll bet."

"At least they're honest. They don't pretend to be what they're not. Howard doesn't, anyway."

"Howard who?"

"Howard Cherney, the man you saw last night. He's really *very* nice."

"And rich?"

"And rich. He's some kind of patent attorney, I think. From what he told me, he's worth something like eighteen or twenty million dollars."

I frowned at her. "I didn't think you were the type."

"Oh, don't be so moral. Can't I like a rich man?"

"Sure, but—hey, wait a minute. This guy's name is familiar." I chewed on my lip and tried to jog my memory. Finally, I came up with: "Smith. That's where I heard it."

"You mean that creepy college chum of yours?"

"He had an uncle named Howard Cherney. He became his guardian when Smith's mother died. The thing fits. Maybe the patents he's attorneying for are Smith's patents. Maybe my friend Smith is a millionaire now, too."

"How delightful," Evelyn said. "You must introduce me."

That was the beginning of my new relationship with Smith. Evelyn got the facts from her rich boy friend, and sure enough, he turned out to be Smith's guardian, a man who had made a fortune on Smith's electronic genius. He told her that his nephew was

living in seclusion in a suburb called Harmel. I found out where and wrote Smith a letter. His reply read:

Dear Luke,

*Will expect you on the 7th,
at 2:30.*

Smith

I expected to find something palatial, but Smith's address in Harmel turned out to be nothing more than a huge, poorly-renovated barn. When I knocked on the door, Smith himself answered. I had no trouble recognizing him. He had grown upwards and outwards in six years, but his face still had its sad, boyish expression, and his eyes when they turned on me were dual caverns of disturbing darkness. He looked tired, yet somehow elated, inspired by a hidden power.

Our first greeting was hesitant, and slightly embarrassed. We didn't even shake hands. Smith led me inside the place, and I smelled an accumulation of dust and grime and ozone that wasn't pleasant on the nostrils.

"I've been working," he said, wiping his hands on his trousers."

"Understand you've done pretty well, Smith."

"I've done very well. I'm

almost ready for it now. Another two or three years—”

“I meant your inventions. Evelyn, the girl I wrote you about, she says your uncle's loaded. I guessed that you must be fairly well off, too.”

“Toys,” Smith said grimly. “The only reason I bothered with the inventions was to get money for equipment. It's a costly business; you have no idea.” He looked at me sharply. “How much money does my uncle have?”

It was a strange question, but I answered it. “I dunno. Evelyn says eighteen or twenty million. Don't you know?”

“No. I haven't kept track of the finances; I've been too busy. But I suppose I'll have to start thinking about money soon. I'll be needing a great deal.”

“What for?”

He moved his lips in what passed for a Smith-smile. “You should know, Luke. You saw the original model.”

Then I remembered the glass-enclosed cabinet, and the tiny ball of growing matter, and the dreadful moment at the refrigeration switch. I heard the terrible whine of the device in the soundbox of my memory, and then the deafening roar of the explosion . . .

“You're kidding,” I said feebly. “You're not still messing around with that world-building machine?”

“Not messing around. Concentrating.”

He walked to a door that led to the basement stairs.

“Come have a look,” Smith said.

We went down the steps, and I halted half-way down to clutch the rail in amazement. Virtually the entire basement floor was occupied by a cabinet much like the one Smith had demonstrated to me at Ardmore. But it was wider; easily forty feet across, and some ten feet high. The bang of gauges and switches on the control panel were multiplied in the dozens.

I descended the rest of the stairs slowly, recalling the holocaust caused by the first device, and not wanting to speculate on the destructive possibilities of this one.

“Don't worry,” Smith chuckled dryly. “A simple mechanical failure can't occur again. The machine is controlled by a servo-mechanism that's self-correcting. Would you like a demonstration?”

“No!”

“That's just as well,” Smith said, and I sighed. “I've been

putting the machine through a number of experiments today; I'd just as soon let it rest. Basically, the same principles are applied as the model you saw at Ardmore, although I've made some important improvements. I've learned enough since then to create not only worlds, but actually worlds with their own satellites, and in any orbital relationship I choose. My problems with the world-machine are just about ended, Luke. But I have a far more difficult project underway now—and I suppose I'm ready to concede failure."

"Failure?" I said. "That doesn't sound like you, Smith. What could you fail with?"

There was a tubular metal chair facing the machine. Smith sat in it, wearily.

"Life," he said.

"What?"

"Oh, not simple cellular life. I solved that particular problem two years ago, created a crystal grouping that was bio-chemically assimilable. I trust you won't mention this to anyone; I'm not interested in that kind of publicity. But that's the fact: I've created laboratory life. The problem is to evolve it into something more than activated slime."

"I'm sorry," I said. "You're more unintelligible to me than ever, Smith. I don't know what you're talking about."

Smith pushed himself out of the chair and walked to the other side of the basement. He wheeled over an ebony-black cabinet with a high-powered microscope on its top surface.

"This will make it clear," he said. "One of my manufactured worlds is inside this cabinet; the microscope is focused to give you a good picture of its terrain—and its inhabitants."

"Inhabitants?"

"See for yourself."

I went to the microscope and put my eyes to the twin lenses. Smith made some adjustments for my focal range, and I looked at his manmade world.

It was a rocky, pitted, unlovely world. There were deep grooves and cavities and blemishes on its surface. It was arid and devoid of greenery.

Then I saw the thing coming out of a crevice.

It was sluggish, uncertain of its movements. It crawled with a clumsy locomotion of its gelatinous body, and seemed to be getting nowhere. It was colorless, and

almost transparent, and completely revolting.

"Ugh!" I pulled my eyes away and looked at Smith in disgust. "What the hell was that?"

"A Smith-creature," Smith said wryly, perhaps even with amusement. "Nothing I'm proud of, you can be sure of that. But a Smith-creature nevertheless, created by Smith, nurtured by Smith, kept alive or made dead by Smith. But unfortunately, without the sense or intelligence to worship Smith, or make Smith proud of his accomplishment."

I didn't like what he was saying, and I began to move back towards the stairway.

"Don't be horrified," he said. "My meager effort isn't even worth that. It's made me realize that there is a limit to what I can do, in the time I want to do it. So I'm through with creating life, Luke. The project can't afford to wait so long."

"What project?"

Smith bent down and peered into the microscope. Then he sighed, and opened a panel in the side of the cabinet. There were four simple dials. He turned one of them, and looked into the lens once more.

"Farewell," he said softly.

"What have you done?"

"Smith giveth," he said, "and Smith taketh away..."

"You've killed it?"

"With simple heat. Like fire from heaven."

"You're crazy!"

I bit down hard on my lip as the words came out of my mouth. It was a thought I'd never permitted my own mind to have, and a thought I meant never to express to anyone—especially Smith.

But he didn't take offense. He said: "At times, a little madness is an asset. Just a little. But let's go upstairs and have coffee, Luke. We've got a lot to talk about." He turned and led the way.

We had coffee, and Smith and I sat around for an hour in the dim room upstairs, talking about our college days. I began to relax, until Smith put down his cup and said:

"I'm going to create a world, Luke."

"What?"

"A better world. A world without fault, and a world without end. A world where Nature is subservient to Man, and Man subservient to God. A world where beauty and perfection are more important than hate and lust. A world where Man can live in

peace and harmony and eternal truth."

I stared at him. The pat little speech had come out of him without emotion. I had the impression that this, too, was something learned by rote, the way Smith knew the Bible.

"Are you serious?" I said.

"Deadly serious. Within two years or three, I'm going out into space and add another planet to this solar system of ours. The problems are vast, but not insurmountable. I had hoped to evolve my own breed of life for this planet, create my own kind of homo sapiens by artificial evolution. I know now that this was only childish dreaming. Worlds are far easier to create than Man. Man calls for time; I don't have that kind of time at my disposal."

I didn't know what to say.

"I've calculated carefully," Smith went on. "I've worked on nothing else since leaving Archmore. Now I'm almost ready to begin." He frowned suddenly. "Money," he said.

"Money?"

"You're right; I'll need a great deal of it, an enormous amount. You say Howard has eighteen million?"

"That's what I hear."

"It'll do for a start. Do you

have any connections in the stock market, Luke?"

"No. Unless you count Briggs, the financial editor of the paper."

"It doesn't matter. I can learn what I don't know. My problem will be to develop a trading system which will give me the funds I need without crippling the national economy. I don't want to inaugurate Smith's world by having a planetary enemy."

"Now, look," I said weakly, annoyed at this last expression of ego. But Smith wouldn't be interrupted. He fixed his eyes on my face and asked:

"What do you say, Luke? Will you join me in this enterprise?"

"What's that?"

"I want you to join me, help me. I know it's a great deal to ask; I'm sure your journalism career is important to you. But I want you on Smith's World, Luke. I want you to be by my side when I create it, people it, manage its affairs, bring it to a state of glory this silly globe of ours will never see."

It took me awhile before I could muster up the right words to refuse Smith's offer.

"You're being foolish, Luke. I'm serious about this world I'm going to create.

You know me; I mean to do what I say. I'm offering you the opportunity to be my principal assistant. To be—" He paused, and his eyes stopped seeing me. "To be God's right hand."

I turned my back and went to the stairs.

"Don't decide hastily," Smith said. "If the scientific or spiritual aspects of my plan don't interest you, perhaps the materialistic will. If it's money you're interested in, I can make you the richest man of Smith's World, Luke. Women? You'll never have such opportunities on Earth as I plan to provide on my planet—"

"Cut it out," I said. "I don't want to hear any more about it, Smith. I suppose you know what you're doing, and I don't doubt that you will. But let's get this clear. I like the world under my feet right now. I don't want any other. And don't forget, Smith. I'm the old atheist, remember. I don't believe in God; not even your kind."

His face changed slowly, but it changed. For a moment, he was almost pouting, like a thwarted child. Then he was the Smith I knew: frozen-faced, sufficient unto himself.

"We'll see," he said quietly. "There's still time, Luke.

Maybe you'll change your mind."

Six months went by before I knew definitely that Smith's plans were beyond the dreaming phase. The realization came when Lou Briggs, the *Times-Express* financial editor, called me into his office and offered me a chair.

I was flattered. The *Times-Express* was an important business paper, and its financial chief a man of consequence.

"You know Smith?" he asked. Briggs was a small, sallow-skinned man with bad teeth. He looked worried.

"Yes, I know him. Why?"

"Been following the Wall Street news?"

"Not particularly. Anything happening?"

Briggs grunted. "Your friend's decided to take a flyer on the market. He didn't do so well at first; dropped almost a million dollars in two days of trading. We didn't play up the story; some of our friends on the Exchange don't like that kind of publicity."

"So what?"

"Well, he's been doing better. He's recouped his losses, and he's been gathering strength ever since. From what I hear, he's displaying

the shrewdest trading sense since the days of the old Wall Street barons. The talk on the street is—" Briggs began to worry his lower lip. "He's out for a killing. Maybe the biggest in the history of the market. If his luck holds out—"

"What are you telling me, Mr. Briggs?"

"If this madman continues successfully, he'll cause a panic. There'll be millions lost. It's crazy to think that he'll succeed; the law of averages is against him; he's violating every sound law of finance—"

I couldn't prevent the snicker. "If I know Smith, Mr. Briggs, he's got the law on his side."

"Then you think he can do it?"

"I don't know anything about the stock market. But I do know that Smith's a genius. If he wants something bad enough, he'll get it."

Brigg's yellow face got paler. "I've invested myself," he said. "Invested heavily. He can ruin me . . ."

I stood up. "Is that all, Mr. Briggs?"

"Maybe you can talk to him. He's your friend—"

"Sorry. He's not the kind to take advice."

"Goddam him!" Briggs hit the desk with his fist. "What he's doing is immoral—illegal! We'll get the SEC on him! He can't do this thing—"

I walked out of the office, and my hands were so unsteady that I shoved them into my pocket. Then I sat at my desk and thought about Smith, and the more I thought, the more depressed I became. I was glad when the phone rang half an hour later, especially when I recognized the voice of Evelyn Armour.

"Hi, Sara Bernhardt," I said. "I was thinking about calling you. Doing anything tonight, or did your sugar daddy run out of glucose?"

"Luke—"

The choked quality in her voice took the flippancy out of mine. "What's wrong, kid?"

"It's Howard. Howard Cherney."

"What about him?"

"He—he was supposed to call for me tonight. But I changed my mind, I didn't want to see him. I called his office a while ago, and found out what happened . . . Luke, please come see me."

"I don't quite understand, sweetie? What's the matter with Cherney?"

"He's dead. He shot himself. Something to do with the stock market. I didn't think people did that sort of thing anymore—"

"Look," I said quickly. "Hang up the phone and stay right where you are. I'll come over as fast as I can."

I found Evelyn huddled into the corner of her sofa when I arrived, looking pale and helpless. All the shiny, theatrical brightness was gone from her appearance, but somehow, that made me like her all the more. Suddenly, she looked not only available, but human and desirable. Before we spoke, I took her in my arms. We didn't talk about Howard Cherney's suicide for almost an hour. We found other things to talk about.

I knew that Smith's invasion of the Stock Exchange was part of his master plan for what he called Smith's World, and I knew that he had been callous enough to put a down payment on that plan with the life of his own uncle. But now Smith and his ambitions didn't seem very important to me, not in comparison with the discovery I made that afternoon in Evelyn's apartment. My collegiate, sneering attitude about

love had been radically altered in a matter of minutes, and nothing in the universe seemed half so important to me as Evelyn.

We began talking about marriage at once, I began to make plans for setting the newspaper world on its ear. I had a purpose and direction in my life suddenly, and I guess, in my own way, I was as dedicated as Smith was in his.

That's why the letter hurt so much, the letter that lay on my mail stack just two months after the Smith Panic in Wall Street.

It was short and to the point:

*We are sorry to inform you
that your services are no
longer required.*

*H. Culver, Pres.
Times-Express*

I went raging into the offices of the city editor with the letter, but all I got was a shrug. That afternoon, I spent four hours on the telephone, calling up every friend or acquaintance I had in the business, rooting out job information. None were particularly helpful, so I decided to make the rounds in person.

I saw the employment manager of every newspaper in

the city. Without exception, they pleaded "no openings."

Evelyn was understanding. She suggested I try some out-of-town papers, and I followed her advice for the next two months. In all, thirty-four papers on the east coast, six on the west, and five in the middle states of the country told me the same story.

No openings.

It took me almost four months, until the year had ended, to realize what had happened to me. It wasn't slack season in the newspaper game. It wasn't my lack of ability or experience. It was much simpler than that. Somehow, for some reason, I'd been blackballed, marked lousy, struck off the lists.

"Smith," Evelyn said one night.

"What's that?"

"Remember what you told me, Luke? About the offer he made you? Do you suppose *he* had anything to do with your not getting work? He's practically a billionaire now. He could apply a lot of pressure . . ."

I denied her idea at first. Then I thought it over, and began to wonder. I sat down and drafted a blunt letter to Smith, putting the question in clear terms.

A day later, I got a clear reply, in the form of a telegram beneath my door.

It read:

YOU ARE CORRECT. HOW-EVER GREAT EMPLOY-ME-N-T OPPORTUNITY AWAITS YOU IMMEDI-ATELY. SALARY ONE HUN-DRED THOUSAND DOLLARS A YEAR. REPLY AT ONCE IF INTEREST-ED.

SMITH

I showed Evelyn the telegram, and to my surprise, she began to laugh.

"What is it? What's so funny?"

"You are!" she said. "You're dying to take this job with Smith, aren't you? You've always wanted to take it, really. I can tell from the way you talk about him. You're Smith's greatest admirer and you hate to admit it. You're not fighting Smith, Luke. You're fighting yourself."

I crumpled the telegram into a ball.

"Maybe you're right. A hundred grand a year can't be sneezed at. I couldn't make that much in ten years on the paper. With a salary like that, we wouldn't have to wait any more, would we?"

There wouldn't be any need—"

"No," Evelyn said. She came close to me.

"I'll call Smith."

"Tomorrow," Evelyn said.

I was the first employee of Smith, Inc. to move into the 87-storey Smith Building that had been erected in Flushing Meadows, New York.

I suppose no building ever erected on this Earth has caused so much controversy as the Smith Building, with the possible exception of the Tower of Babel. Architects were enraged by its outlandish size and freak construction, at the way its curved surfaces twisted back into itself with all the hellish cunning of a Klein bottle. Economists were infuriated at the sudden drain of manpower it caused. Smith hired eight thousand clerical and stenographic workers in the first three months of the building's operation; almost four hundred of the nation's best programmers to handle his giant computors; three thousand engineers; six thousand scientists in every conceivable field; thousands of other skilled workers in assorted pursuits of industry. But undoubtedly, the most

controversial aspect of the Smith Building was its function as a recruiting center for the superior race of Man that would inhabit Smith's World.

I still remember the first announcement ad prepared by Smith to introduce his recruiting drive. Many others followed, and a barrage of publicity that blanketed every form of communications. But that first ad is indelibly impressed on my mind.

WANTED

*One Million Superior Men
and Women*

If you believe you have superior and/or mental capabilities, and are interested in joining other men and women of your caliber in the most important enterprise of human history, you are invited to write for full details concerning the establishment of a new planetary home for the human race. This is an unprecedented opportunity to begin life anew on a better world: a world without fault and without end, where Nature is subservient to Man, and Man subservient to God; where beauty and perfection are more important than hate or lust; where Man can live in peace and harmony and

eternal Truth. Send complete details about yourself to
SMITH, INC.
Flushing Meadows, New York

It's hard to say whether the first national reaction to the Smith - advertisement was shock, rage, laughter, or puzzlement—probably a combination of all. But whatever emotions Smith's recruiting drive provoked, it also produced replies. Replies by the thousands, and then replies by the millions. In three months, twenty-five million letters in all poured into Flushing Meadows, causing a major crisis for the local postal authorities, and necessitating an additional clerical staff at the Smith Building of almost five hundred.

Smith was overjoyed at the response, but his happiness was short-lived. The first eliminations of the letters left only twelve million. The first interview of candidates eliminated another three million. Then the testing procedure began, and it became apparent that the Smith-standards, as personally set by Smith, were far too demanding to produce the One Million Superior Men and Women the advertisement requested.

I had seen wholesale test-

ing procedures before, but never on a scale like this. There were rugged medical examinations, physical tests so exhausting that they actually broke the health of many candidates, mental tests that were severe enough to cause breakdowns among even the most intelligent and stable.

Nine million people in all, motivated by the Smith-promises of Nirvana in their lifetime, submitted themselves to the grueling examinations.

After almost a year of testing, only sixty thousand candidates were marked "ACCEPTABLE" by the Smith-standards.

As for myself, I was given the title of Assistant to the President, paid regularly, awarded the deference my title commanded, stationed in a six-window office the size of a small railroad terminal, and given nothing to do.

It wasn't long before I realized that my function in the organization was practically non-existent. I had no talents that could be applied to either the formation of the plans for Smith's World, or the testing of candidates. My journalistic abilities had no place in Smith's schemes. Once, when I suggested that

his World would require an historian, he nodded assent and had me recruit a staff of five of the country's most respected historic writers, and merely laughed dryly when I suggested that I become a member of their team.

"You do what you're doing," Smith told me. "We can hire all the specialists we need."

The answer depressed me, but I didn't argue. I knew that what I was "doing" was nothing at all, that my place in Smith's plan was to serve as his paid companion, errand boy, confidant, friend. If I dwelt on the thought, it would torment me. So I didn't think about it. I reported to work every day, shuffled meaningless papers on my desk, read a little, wrote a little, inspected the various operations of the building, and waited eagerly for payday. I convinced myself that what I was doing was justified: I was making money, and saving it towards the day when I could give Evelyn the secure life she was entitled to. When we had that security, I would leave this empty, purposeless job, leave Smith and his egotistical designs, re-join the human race and live the life that Evelyn and I wanted to live.

That was how I rationalized my life. Yet even as I argued with myself over its logic, I knew that I was becoming corrupted in Smith's service, that this easy life and its lush rewards were having a drugging effect upon my will.

Evelyn knew it, too. And one day, she told me her viewpoint in terms that left me no choice.

"I want you to quit," she said. "For your own sake, Luke. I want you to leave Smith."

I tried to laugh off her words.

"I'm serious. I was wrong to tell you to take this job, Luke. I—I didn't know what kind of monster he really was. He's sapping your strength. He's making you into some kind of jackal—"

I said: "Let's be realistic, sweetie. In another year or so, he'll have that manufactured world of his ready to be launched. Then the whole enterprise will be ended as far as we're concerned. We can take our money and live a little."

"Do you really believe that? What makes you think *you* won't have to go to Smith's World, too, Luke? He's so dependent on you—"

I laughed again. "Dependent on me? You don't know Smith. He's not dependent on anybody. Since when does God need a friend?"

"I tell you he is! In some kind of crazy way, Smith needs you. He won't let you go! But I need you, too, Luke. Don't you see what will happen? It's going to end up in a contest, a rivalry. And I have a feeling Smith will win. He always wins."

I put my arms around her. "You don't know what you're saying. Nothing could make me lose you, Evelyn. Nothing in the universe."

"Don't." She broke away from me. "I mean it, Luke. Quit now, or you'll never quit. Quit now, or—" She turned away from my eyes. "Or we're through."

"Evelyn!"

"That's how I feel, Luke! I'd rather lose you now than later. It would be easier for both of us. That's all I have to say. No more talk will help. You must make a choice."

The next day, I sent my letter of resignation to the head office. I didn't show up at the Smith Building. I told myself that I wouldn't take the risk of having Smith's arguments sway my decision, but I also knew that I was

simply afraid to face Smith in this hour.

That night, I received a telegram.

ACCEPT YOUR RESIGNATION WITH GREAT RELUCTANCE. HOWEVER IMPLORÉ YOU TO PERFORM ONE LAST IMPORTANT ERRAND FOR ME. PLEASE VISIT DR. MARTIN CORCORAN AT SALO LABORATORIES S A N FRANCISCO AND DO WHAT YOU CAN TO ENLIST HIS INTEREST IN OUR ENTERPRISE. IF YOU ARE SUCCESSFUL WILL TERMINATE OUR CONTRACT WITH BONUS OF TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS. BEST WISHES.

SMITH

The reply startled me; it was nothing like the response I had anticipated from Smith. I called Evelyn and read her the telegram. She was equally dumbfounded.

"I guess one more errand won't hurt," I said. "And we could sure use the money. What do you say?"

She hesitated about saying yes, but finally did. I called the airport and made a reservation on the next west-bound flight. Then I contact-

ed the Personal Information Service at the Smith Building and had them deliver a file on Dr. Martin Corcoran to my home.

Dr. Corcoran turned out to be an extremely prominent biophysicist, one of the leaders in his field. He was a virile man of some sixty years, so totally immersed in his work that he knew amazingly little of the Smith-publicity of recent times. It took me almost a week to make contact with him, and still another before I could entice him away from his laboratory long enough to listen to an hour's conversation about the Smith-project.

At first, he was amused by my solicitation, and completely negative. But I had learned enough about Smith tactics to take the proper approach to a man like Corcoran. I painted a portrait of Smith's World that was a picture of idealized research conditions, a Paradise for the scientific worker, free of all materialistic demands, abundant in facilities and funds, ripe with opportunities for work and study. It was the right approach. Within another week, Dr. Corcoran was calling me at my hotel, wanting to know more about the plan, asking questions. The hook had been baited. By the end of the

month, Dr. Corcoran was nodding his head yes to the Smith-proposal.

I returned to New York after thirty-five days in California, thinking gleeful thoughts of the bonus Smith had promised.

My first stopping-place was Evelyn's apartment.

I had never seen her looking so lovely. She seemed taller, more ethereal. She had been letting her golden hair grow, and now it seemed longer than ever, spilling behind her back in a glittering cascade. There was a brightness surrounding her that was even more radiant than the hard star-brightness that used to shine in her eyes.

But when I held her and kissed her, I found her lips cold.

"What's the matter?" I said.

"Nothing, Luke. Why?"

"I don't know. There's something different about you."

She laughed. "Don't be silly. Was the trip all right?"

"It was fine; Smith will be pleased. Dr. Corcoran is joining the organization next month."

"Will he have to take the test?"

"I don't think Smith will

ask that. Not for a man of Corcoran's reputation; he needs him too much."

I pulled her towards me, and again I felt resistance. Something was wrong.

"What the hell!" I said angrily. "What happened since I went away, Evelyn? You're different."

"No, I'm not. It's just that I've been—well, I've been so busy. Rehearsing."

"What?"

"I've been given a part, Luke. In a new play."

I grinned with relief. "Is that all? I thought it was something serious."

"It is serious. It's a wonderful play; the finest I've ever read. It's a chance like nothing I've ever had before, Luke. That's why I'm so on edge, I suppose. I don't know how to tell you—"

"Tell me what?"

"It has something to do with Smith."

"I don't understand."

"Right after you left the city, somebody from Smith, Inc. came to see me. It seems that Smith hired Arthur Trumbull, the playwright, to write a play about—about Smith's World. That's the general theme, anyway. It's a beautiful play, really it is, Luke. And Smith wants me to play the lead."

I stared at her. "I don't get it. Why you?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't mean it that way, Evelyn. But what's the reason? Smith always has a reason."

"How should I know? All I know is that the opportunity is so marvelous, Luke—"

I didn't know what to think. I didn't like the idea, but I couldn't find any arguments against it. Smith had never demonstrated any particular interest in the arts, no more than was necessary. Was this some kind of public relations scheme on behalf of his beloved project? And why choose Evelyn, *my* Evelyn, for the starring role? There were hundreds of actresses with more stature.

Then I began to feel guilty about my attitude, and said:

"I think it's wonderful, honey. If Smith's behind it, the play's bound to be a smash. He won't let himself be associated with any kind of failure."

"I knew you'd understand, Luke."

I said: "What's the part like?"

Her eyes grew distant.

"I play Eve."

A month before the opening of Smith's play, the first

Smith-rocket was launched from Death Valley.

It wasn't the first man-carrying rocket which had left Earth. By now, the Air Force Interplanetary Corps had launched half a dozen manned vehicles on exploratory flights in the Earth's orbit, and two successful landings had been made on the Moon.

But the Smith-vessel, a sixty-rocket, 10,000-ton monster, dwarfed anything that had been previously launched into space. Its time of departure, its cargo, its destination, its purpose, were all kept under a security cloud.

Two days later, a second Smith-rocket departed, and days apart, two other ships left the Death Valley desert, heading out to join the other vessels on some mysterious mission in outer space.

I won't conceal the fact that the mechanics of how Smith planned to create his world in actual space mystified me thoroughly, despite my closeness to Smith. Perhaps not even the thousands of scientists now in his employ understood it completely, although many submitted learned articles on Smith's world-building process to their trade journals. I tried to extrapolate the method

from what I had seen in the Smith world-machine at the University and his suburban laboratory in Harmel, but the problems of creating a planet away from those controlled conditions seemed so vast that my head ached when I thought about it. Vaguely, I reasoned that he would have to attract an enormous amount of interstellar particles to some central point, and recreate the conditions that took Nature billions of years to produce in an incredibly abbreviated time. The task seemed impossible. But I knew Smith.

Then the play opened.

Few of us who were there will ever forget that first performance of Arthur Trumbull's *The World*. On the surface, it seemed no different from a hundred other first-nights on Broadway, but there was a tangible air of special excitement the moment the audience faced the gigantic curtain in the city's largest theatre. No backstage visitors were permitted, so I didn't get the chance to see Evelyn before curtain time. I took my seat in the fifth row, and studied the program notes.

Then Smith came in.

His arrival created a reac-

tion on that audience such as no stage performance could have equaled. When he took his seat down front, every head turned to see the man whose genius was at this very moment creating a new planet for the solar system.

He nodded to me briefly before sitting down, and the nod brought awed and curious glances in my direction. I stirred uncomfortably, trying not to feel pleased at this tribute.

Then the curtain rose.

You've probably seen *The World*, or read it in book form, and you know its merits and faults as a work of theatrical fiction. Perhaps you were even fortunate enough to see Evelyn Armour in the role of Eve. But unless you were among the audience on that opening night, you can't imagine the intensity of emotion that play or that performance could generate in the human soul.

Some critics call *The World* a religious play, and I suppose with some truth. But only those who knew Smith as I did realized the deeper significance of the play's action, the terrible meaning concealed in the glib, poetic dialogue. For as I watched the stage, I knew that Smith

had subtly guided Trumbull's efforts in a manner calculated not to praise the God of our Fathers, the God of Sinai or Judah, the God of Calvary, the God of Jesus; the God of the Jews or Christians or Moslems, or any other religion, creed, or sect. There was only one God to whom the words on the stage were directed.

Smith.

Smith, the God.

Evelyn's performance was brilliant. Her radiance seemed to light the stage with evangelical fire. But somehow, I couldn't merely feel proud of her. I felt afraid, too, as if the role she was playing was more truly herself than the Evelyn I knew.

The curtain descended to thunderous applause, and when the house lights returned, I saw that Smith was no longer in his seat.

I tried to reach Evelyn backstage, but the attempt failed. I went out into the street and spent three hours at a neighboring bar, getting thoroughly stoned. Then I went up to her apartment, and pushed open the door without knocking.

"Luke—"

She turned to me, and her eyes were wide and frightened over the shoulder of the

man who was holding her in his arms.

I felt nothing; not rage, not injury, nothing.

"I'm sorry," Smith said quietly. "I'm really very sorry, Luke."

"It's nothing," I muttered stupidly. "Think nothing of it."

Evelyn began to cry, and Smith comforted her.

"It's all right," I said. "Really, Evelyn, it's all right. I understand."

Then the numbness passed, and an emotion too complex for me to name swept through me.

I dropped to my knees and folded my hands beneath my chin.

"Thank you, O Lord," I said. "Thank you for all our many blessings." Once I began I couldn't stop.

Smith said: "Get up, Luke."

"Smith is my shepherd, I shall not want . . ."

"You're drunk," Smith said coldly. "Get up and go to bed, Luke. We can talk about this tomorrow."

"All hail," I said, and ridiculously, there were tears in my eyes. "Hail to our Lord Smith, God of the Universe, Lord of all Creation. Praise Smith unto the Highest . . ."

Then I fell forward, grate-

ful that I had drunk enough to be rewarded with oblivion.

The year that followed is a year I don't like to remember, and a year in which the events following the launching of the Smith-rockets into outer space were public knowledge. You know the basic facts, of course. The fact that Smith's World, a planet the size of Mercury, 3,000 miles in diameter, provided with an atmosphere perhaps even more favorable for the sustainment of life than our own, became part of the orbital pattern of the solar system, equidistant to Earth and the planet Mars.

You know that the exodus from Earth to Smith's World was coincided with one of the most disastrous economic panics in the nation's history. You know the story of the east coast riots, and the unsuccessful attempt to indict Smith on the charge of high treason. The whole incredible tale of that year that has been chronicled many times, and by journalists better equipped than myself to detail them.

It was a year of Hell for many people. It was a year of Hell for myself.

There's one thing I wish to make clear. Without under-

standing of this point, this whole recording of my Smith-facts loses meaning. The year that I spent in the sanitorium at Boonsocket had nothing whatever to do with the health of my mind, not in any pathological sense. That's a fact which can be verified. I became a simon-pure alcoholic; there was never any question about my sanity.

Nor should there be any doubt as to whether my stay in the sanitorium was voluntary or not. It was; Smith had nothing to do with it. After Evelyn made her decision to join Smith on his World, I sought my solace in the brown bottle and found it waiting for me there. I drank myself into that sanitorium; there was no effort on Smith's part to have me put away. On the contrary—Smith continued to make overtures to me, offerings of money and other help. It seems he never forgot the obligation he felt towards me, because of what happened that night of the explosion at Ardmore University. Say what you will of Smith. He was grateful to me.

I was in the sanitorium for nine months, before I was able to re-enter the outside world.

It was a different world I

found. A quieter, more humble world, a world no longer certain of its superiority in the cosmos.

There was no news from Smith's world.

A few tales would trickle in but nothing noteworthy.

After a while, I found a job. It wasn't much of a job: I became the assistant editor on a low-circulation picture magazine, that probably hired me in the hope I would someday give them the rights to the Smith-story as I knew it. They didn't press me for it; they were content to wait. But I was trying hard to forget everything about Smith, particularly as he concerned Evelyn. I knew now that Smith's seduction of Evelyn had begun merely as an attempt to remove her influence from me, so that I would continue as Smith's paid companion without interference. Then the seduction had become something else, and Smith had found a Queen for his new kingdom.

But I didn't think about it. I did my job conscientiously, if not brilliantly. The large amount of money I had earned in Smith's employ had dwindled as a result of my alcoholic year, and I needed the dollars that came in my

pay envelope every two weeks.

I took a small room in a boarding house in a moderate section of the city. I kept regular hours, had few friends, and slept a great deal.

That was the only time I was unable to keep Smith out of my mind: when sleep came. Because sleep brought dreams, and my dreams brought me a vision of Smith that was repeated without variation; night after night the same thing appeared.

I would see the panorama of space, the star-studded blackness of the void, awesome and mighty and beautiful.

Then I would see a great spaceship leaving the green planet which was its home, a spaceship throbbing with the humanity inside it.

At first, the ship remained evenly on its course, heading for some rendezvous with a better world.

Then the hand would appear.

A giant hand, the hand of a God, fingers galaxy-sized would reach forth towards the spaceship, as if dissatisfied with its destination.

Then the fingers would close slowly around the vessel, slowly encircle it, hold it

in its palm, crush it, destroy it.

It was the hand of Smith. I knew it could be no other.

But except for that dream, my conscious mind knew nothing of Smith. It wasn't Smith that troubled my waking hours. It was someone else.

And every evening, I'd look out of my window and see the pinpoint of light in the heavens that was Smith's World, and I would fight off my thoughts of Evelyn.

Then the Ghost came.

I was sleeping when it arrived, and when its hoarse voice awakened me, I thought that the delirium of drink which had plagued me months before had returned.

The Ghost was standing at the foot of my bed, shimmering as if in waves of heat, staring at me with hollow eyes.

I wanted to scream, but my throat was dry.

Then I recognized the uncertain form.

It was Smith. The Ghost of Smith.

"Luke," the hoarse voice said, a grating distortion of Smith's own mellow tones.

"Who are you?" I said.

"You know me. I am Smith. Don't be frightened; this is

no mumbo-jumbo, Luke. This is Smith, your friend."

I covered my eyes with my hands.

"Listen to me," the Ghost said. "You are not seeing phantoms. This is merely an electronic projection of my own image, a purely mechanical trick. I'm not quite sure how I appear to you; the device is still imperfect."

"Where are you?"

"I am on Smith's World, in my own chambers. This is the first such projection I have made, and it is not a complete success. I am unable to see you clearly, Luke. If you can see and understand me, please signify."

"Yes," I said. "I can understand you. What do you want?"

"Only to talk to you, Luke. I understand that you haven't been well. I'm sorry."

I snorted.

"You are still angry with me over Evelyn. I'm sorry for that, too, Luke. But we have no time for apologies; this contact may be broken at any moment. I wish to ask you to join us on Smith's World."

"Never," I said. "You're wasting your time, Smith. I don't want any part of it."

"You must think it over, Luke. Let me tell you about

what my world is like. It is a world of perfection. A world of alabaster cities and human harmony. A world of beauty. Look at me, Luke. Can you see what I am holding?"

The Ghost lifted something round in its hand. I couldn't make it out.

"It's an apple, an apple straight from a new Garden of Eden, twelve inches in diameter. And not one of your monstrous chemical-grown fruits, Luke. A tender, juicy apple, typical of our farm produce, symbolic of the difference between the old world and the new. Our grass and trees are the greenest you have ever seen, Luke. Our waters are clear as mirrors, and our weather is the balmiest you have ever known. There are birds of rarest beauty, and wild life of exquisite perfection. Our cities are wonders, and our culture is already a thriving, vital thing. It is Heaven, Luke."

"Go away!" I buried my face in the pillows.

"I want you on Smith's World, Luke. You will be happy here. There are women of extraordinary loveliness who want you here."

I said: "How is Evelyn?"

The Smith-Ghost said nothing.

Then: "I'm offering you Paradise, Luke. Will you refuse me for the sake of Evelyn alone? Is that the one factor which makes you say no?"

"Yes," I said angrily. "I'm sorry if it seems trivial to you, Smith. But that's how I feel, and I say the hell with you!"

"Then you refuse?"

"Yes!" I shouted. "I refuse! I won't worship you, Smith! You're not my God!"

"Do you have a God?"

"Maybe I do." My voice trembled. "Maybe you've made me see God, Smith. Maybe you've converted me, all by yourself. Imagine that!" I started to laugh. "You make me want to pray, Smith, pray to the God of Earth. And if I do, I'll mention you in my prayers. I'll ask forgiveness for you, Smith, forgiveness . . ."

I couldn't stop the sobs that came into my throat.

"I'm sorry," Smith said gently.

The Ghost vanished.

I suppose that was the first contact Smith made with Earth since his departure. But it wasn't his last. Five months after the Ghost's visit to my bedroom, the first Smith-vessel made a return

trip to Earth, containing a delegation of Smith-men appointed to establish relations with the planet of their birth. They came not as visitors, but as representatives of another interplanetary power to the United Nations.

At first, the UN debated their sovereignty, and their right to deal with the Earth nations as a separate and distinct entity. There were days of arguments among the UN members, and a special commission was formed to study the question. Finally, they ruled that Smith's World was not a legally constituted entity, and therefore not entitled to recognition.

The delegation didn't seem surprised at the decision, and merely asked that the UN set up a trading commission between the planets, by which Earth could benefit from the fruits of the scientific progress made on Smith's World, in exchange for those materials which Earth could most readily provide. There were scientific demonstrations held in the now nearly-deserted Smith Building in Flushing Meadows, demonstrations of electronic marvels that were unknown on Earth. An agreement of interplanetary trading rules was drawn up, and Smith's World was given its

first unofficial recognition as a separate power.

It soon became apparent that the "material" most in demand on Smith's World was Manpower.

The testing began again, and lights, were burning brightly once more within the vast halls of the Smith Building. The Smith-standards were no longer so rigid, and of the four or five million candidates who volunteered in the year that followed, almost half a million were accepted for relocation on the new planet.

The Smith-rockets left every week, bringing a new cargo of human material to the tiny glowing pinpoint in the heavens.

To make the record clear, I want to state that the plot to kill Smith didn't originate with me. I no longer know whose scheme it was, which member of the Anti-Smith League was responsible for drafting the plan. One thing I'm sure of is that Alita herself wasn't the originator, although I heard the proposal from her lips first.

I met Alita by what I later realized was a staged incident. I was assigned by the magazine to cover a lecture that was being held in Town Hall

by a Reverend Moore, a lecture provocatively titled: "Is Smith a God?" I accepted the job reluctantly, but my editor assumed that my past connection with Smith would be an asset in the preparation of such a story.

It wasn't the first time a religious leader had made public condemnation of Smith; pulpits all over the world had been ringing with phrases accusing Smith of usurping holy rights. But I suppose this event had greater significance, since the Reverend Harlow Moore had been Smith's own religious instructor in the by-gone days of Smith's childhood.

Reverend Moore was a burly man with a humorous mouth and shaggy white hair in need of trimming. He did no pulpit-pounding when he spoke of Smith. He spoke quietly to the Town Hall audience, a large crowd that filled every seat in the auditorium. He spoke at length about Smith, the child, describing his prowess as a Bible student, remarking upon his feat of learning Old and New Testaments word for word.

"I was impressed," he said with a twinkle. "Greatly impressed, having such a poor memory myself. But I must confess that I mistook this

ability of Smith's. Our friend Smith didn't learn the Bible 'by heart'—only by mind. His heart was never involved, and his soul failed to grasp the deep meaning of the sacred writings. You have heard that the Devil can quote scriptures to his purpose; well, that means the Devil must have a good memory, too."

The lecture continued without heat or rancor, more of a plea for understanding than condemnation. When it was over, I pushed my way down the aisle of the hall. Somehow, in the crush to the exits, I found myself stepping hard on someone's toe, and a woman's voice cried out in pain.

"Gosh, I'm sorry—"

The face that turned towards me was of such striking beauty that I couldn't help staring. Her skin was creamy white, her eyes vividly sea-green, her mouth wide and sensuous. Her black hair was unusually long, and the total effect was of something pagan. She stumbled, and I put my arm out to help her through the crowds filling the aisle. Even through the fabric of her sleeve, her skin felt warm and good to the touch.

When we reached the street, she said: "They say liquor's good for snakebite. How about a crushed toe?"

"I don't know. We can try."

Five minutes later, we were in a cocktail lounge with a highball in front of her and a soft drink for me, learning each other's names and occupations, and discovering a mutual interest in Smith. Her name was Alita Morgan; she was a fashion designer and model. And her interest in Smith—

"Vincent and I were going to be married in the Fall," she told me, her eyes downcast, her knuckles white around the glass. "Then he got interested in Smith's World, and wanted us to take the examinations together at Flushing Meadows. I refused, but Vince went on alone. He passed."

I said: "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It was something that couldn't be helped. I'm glad I found out so soon. If Vince thought some man-made Heaven was more important than me—"

"And why didn't you go? Why didn't you take the examination?"

"Because," she answered coldly. "Because I'm too content with the God I have. I don't want any other, no matter how much Paradise he's selling."

"I guess that's how I feel," I said. "But who knows? May-

be we're both wrong. Maybe Smith doesn't demand that much of the people on his world."

She was studying my face.

"Luke Wingate," she said softly. "Now I remember. You were Smith's friend in college. You even worked for him some years ago."

"That's true."

"But you didn't go to Smith's World?"

"No. I like it here. I like it even better now."

She smiled. "Would you like to come to a party, Luke Wingate?"

The party was at Alita's Greenwich Village apartment, and there were no cocktails served, no jokes told, no hilarity at all. The atmosphere was grim and purposeful. The two dozen participants, the majority of them men, were obviously gathered by more serious motives than conviviality. They didn't call it that, but I realized that I was attending one of the earliest meetings of the Anti-Smith League.

One of the speakers of the group was a thin, scholarly man of middle years named Burgess. He was a professor of history at Columbia, and he told us:

"The future is already clear. Almost three-quarters of a

million people have made the transference from Earth to Smith's World, and as the testing procedures go on, that figure will double and treble.

"But the mere number does not tell the whole story. It is the caliber of the people we are losing. Our best scientists in every field. Our trained engineers. Our most competent artists, writers, journalists, researchers. Many of our best business executives have been lured by the Smith-promises. And that's only the beginning.

"We must face the situation realistically. The attractions of Smith's World are so great that the drain on our most skilled and essential manpower is already becoming crucial. The crisis point looms—a crisis that may well result in a chaos that not even atomic war could bring."

"But what can we do?" Alita whispered.

"Fight," someone said. "Fight with every means at our command. Fight within the UN organization, fight within the sovereign nations, fight with legislature, with pressure, with sanctions. And if necessary—fight with great force."

I hadn't meant to say anything; I was only willing to be a spectator. But at these last words, I said:

"We would lose."

They looked at me.

"We would lose a battle by force. I know Smith. And you know yourself the accumulation of brainpower on Smith's World. Force is no answer, believe me."

"Whatever the answer," Burgess said, "we must try to find it."

There were hours more of sober conversation, and then the crowd departed. I stayed behind, and Alita and I shared some after-party coffee.

We sat at opposite ends of the sofa, talking quietly. It was the first time in over a year that I had been in such attractive feminine company, and the sight of her slim, long-legged figure beside me stirred my pulse.

She said: "I know how to fight Smith."

I moved closer to her.

"I'm tired of talking about Smith. There's been too much talk of Smith."

She didn't resist as my arms went around her.

"Let's forget Smith," I said. "Just for a little while. I'm more interested in you, Alita."

"All right," she said. "How many eggs do you like for breakfast?"

But in the middle of the night, Alita shifted and rose

in the bed to light a cigarette. I muttered something, and she put the cigarette to my lips for a puff. Then she said:

"I know how to fight Smith."

"All right," I moaned.
"How?"

"Kill him."

Alita held my arm tightly as we entered through the first doorway of the Smith-testing Division of the Smith Building. I patted her hand and said something meant to be reassuring.

The first clerk, wearing the gray Smith-uniform with the golden "S" on his sleeve, was cordial. He said:

"Your names, please?"

I cleared my throat.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lukas Wингate."

He walked to the computor and threw the activating switch. The machine chattered, and produced a narrow white punchcard. He came back with it, and handed it to us.

"Carry this with you at all times," he said. "You do understand the regulations concerning married couples? If either one of you fails to be accepted, the acceptable partner cannot gain permission to enter Smith's World without the consent of the other."

"We understand."

"Good. We wish to express to you our gratitude for your interest in Smith's World, and hope your examinations prove successful.

"Thank you," Alita said throatily, and we moved into the first testing zone.

I thought I knew what to expect the moment we got beyond the welcoming-stage of the Smith-testing, but I quickly discovered that the process of examination as I knew it during my employment had changed drastically. The physical tests were no more demanding than standard military service examinations. The mental tests were still strict, but the passing grade standard had been lowered to allow mentalities as average as my own to be passed. The psychological tests were simpler, too, but when the time came for me to face the inquisitor sitting behind the cold metal desk, I had my first doubts about my ability to attain my goal,

"Nice to see you, Mr. Wingate."

The psychiatrist was a dry-lipped, narrow man with brilliantly-polished spectacles.

"You're rather a well-known name around this organization," he said lightly,

but without humor in his eyes. "Quite a lot has happened since you left Smith-employment."

"That's right," I said. "A lot happened."

"You were ill, I believe?"

"You can call it that. I was an alcoholic."

"I see. And how do you feel about liquor now?"

"It's all right for other people."

He nodded his head.

"And now you're married. That's quite a change in a man's life."

"Yes."

"Mrs. Wingate is a very attractive woman."

"Yes."

"How long have you two been married?"

"About four months."

"Uh-huh. And is everything —satisfactory?"

I frowned. "We were born for each other."

"I see. And if you don't mind the question, Mr. Wingate, what are your feelings about—" He looked down at the papers on his desk as if the name was written there. "About Evelyn Armour?"

"Who?"

"Come now, Mr. Wingate."

"Look, isn't this rather personal? Your boy Smith's invited me up there a dozen times. I'm no different now. Do we

have to scrape around the past?"

"No, of course not," the psychiatrist said smoothly. "Then I gather that the old wound is—well, closed?"

"Absolutely. I love my wife and she loves me, and I'm dying to be Queen of the May. Now let's get this farce over with."

The psychiatrist smiled blandly.

"And what about Smith?"

"What about him?"

"How do you feel about Smith, Mr. Wingate? After all, it's no secret that Evelyn Armour was your fiancée before she joined Smith on our World. Do you harbor any resentment?"

"Naturally. As a matter of fact, the only reason I want to get to Smith's World is to punch him right in the nose."

The psychiatrist stiffened, and I saw that I had pushed my joke too far.

"Look, doc," I said, with a feeble grin. "I'm only kidding. Smith was one of my best friends, and I don't have any resentment left. We had some problems about Evelyn, but I'm over that now. Now I'm happily married, and everything's changed. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly." He took off his glasses and tried to shine even

more brilliance into the lenses. "That's all, Mr. Wingate."

At the end of the testing line, my punchcard was handed back to me. I gave it to the final Smith-clerk, and he put it through a computor. When it emerged, he handed it back with a shrug of his shoulder.

Stamped across the card, in red ink, was one word.

"REJECTED."

"Sorry, Mr. Wingate," he said. "If you have any questions as to exactly why this decision was made, or if you wish to argue the case further, you may write to the Smith Appeals Board, at this address. If you're unsuccessful, perhaps you will want to take the Smith-tests again, after the official six-month lapse."

I met Alita outside.

Her card was stamped: "ACCEPTABLE."

"What do we do now?" I said glumly. "I suppose all that's left is for me to give my consent."

"No!" she said violently. "I won't leave without you, Luke."

"Hey, wait a minute." I pulled her towards me. "This was the deal, remember? It's strictly a business proposition. If both of us can't complete the assignment, then one of us must."

She began to cry, soundlessly.

"I can't go without you Luke. I don't care about the Anti-Smith League. I won't go anywhere without you."

"We'll talk about it," I said. "At home."

We were living at Alita's apartment in the Village, but before returning there, we stopped off at the apartment of Burgess, the history professor, to tell him the bad news.

When we finally reached home, there was a telegram beneath the door.

It was addressed to me, and it read:

HAPPY TO INFORM YOU THAT SPECIAL DISPENSATION HAS BEEN MADE IN YOUR CASE. MRS. WINGATE AND YOURSELF MAY PREPARE TO LEAVE FOR SMITH'S WORLD ON NEXT SMITH FLIGHT JUNE 10.

DIRECTOR
SMITH TESTING DIV.

That was how Alita and I came to Smith's World.

We expected to find a world designed in Hollywood concepts, with sweeping skyscrapers and Disney landscapes, where the populace paraded about in clean white

togas among green arbors, where the sun always shone and the birds sung sweetly, and everything was milk and honey and sweetness and light.

It was almost true, but not quite.

From the moment we debarked from the great Smith-rocket that brought us to Smith's World, we knew that Smith had designed a very practical planet. Much of its terrain was almost Spartan in its simplicity. Trees were planted only where shade was needed. Buildings were constructed for their functional requirements. Birds and animals were confined to restricted sanctuaries and woodland areas, and the game animals were severely bred and controlled for the purpose of providing food. There was just so much farm land, and just so much city area. There was no surface vehicle traffic whatsoever; the air was utilized for all transportation. There were no arbors for casual strolling, and no togas anywhere in evidence. Both men and women wore modified Earth clothing, made distinctive only by subtleties of color. There was an air of industry about the streets of the city, but no sound of laughter. Uniformed

Smith-officials were everywhere. I would say that nothing was more immediately apparent than those gray-suited Smith-officials with the golden "S" on their sleeves. None carried weapons, not overtly, and all were exceedingly polite and helpful. But there were so many of them—so many.

The rocket that delivered us to the new planet held over five hundred men and women. But it was clear that we were to be singled out for special attention. After the initial briefing and speech of welcome at the Smith Reception Center, the new Smith-dwellers were herded off into another section of the building for further orientation. But Alita and I were drawn aside by a smooth-faced Smith-official.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wingate?"

"Yes?"

"Would you be so kind as to follow me? You have been requested to share the evening meal with Smith."

Alita looked at me.

"That's fine," I said. "Be good to see the old boy."

The Smith-official's face did not alter.

At the copter station, waiting for the craft that would take us to the quarters of the planet's overlord, we had a moment to ourselves. Alita

whispered to me: "So soon, Luke! To get the chance so soon!"

The thought chilled me, and I gripped her hand.

"Maybe we shouldn't. Maybe we should wait . . ."

"No. The sooner the better," Alita answered grimly. Then her dark expression was exchanged for a sunny smile as the Smith-official returned to our side.

We boarded a copter that lifted us above the streets of the capital city, and swayed in the direction of the tallest edifice to be seen on Smith's World—a white steeple of a building, crowned in glass. We were hovering above it in seconds, and the copter pilot was guiding the craft expertly to the landing platform that formed a balcony around the top of the needle-shaped structure.

Upon landing, another Smith-official took us in tow, this time openly carrying a weapon.

First, there was a corridor, stretching towards a white door. We were scanned photo-electrically. Alita passed the scrutiny, but the metal of my belt buckle set off a warning buzzer. The guard asked me to remove my belt, and I did. This time, the metal-seeking

eyes were silent. Alita and I exchanged glances as we were told to go ahead, thinking the same thought. We were carrying a weapon, but not one which would respond to Smith's warning system. At that moment, I lost some respect for Smith, at his inability to know about the deadly device concealed in Alita's long black hair.

Then the doors opened, and we were in the Chambers.

I expected a throne room, but I was wrong. It was a room furnished in the manner of a supermodern executive suite, with polished marble floors and an enormous crescent-shaped desk. And behind the desk, his dry-straw hair now streaked with gray, but otherwise unchanged: Smith.

I can't recall now what was said in those first few minutes of our reunion. They were all pleasant words, commonplace words about simple things, words ill-suited to the situation of a disbeliever reunited with a God. There was no handshake; there never was with Smith. But he was courteous; there was a smoothness in his manner I'd never known before. He was gallant towards Alita, and made a pretty speech to me about my good taste in women.

"You flatter me," Alita said. "I understand from Luke that you have good taste yourself."

Smith didn't react to the thinly-veiled mention of Evelyn. Instead, he smiled and gestured towards the curved dome of glass that surrounded his quarters.

"What do you think of my world, Luke?" he said. "Have I done things well?"

"Very well. It's not what I expected though—"

"There was no sense in being too radical, not at first. One of our most serious problems on Smith's World is—well, call it nostalgia, homesickness, what you will. So I designed my planet to give us the best of the old as well as the new. In time, there will be changes. I have many plans. I'm glad you've come to share them with me."

I looked at Alita, and saw her hand toying with her hair.

I gasped and said: "Wait!"
"What is it?" Smith said.

"Nothing." My pulse was almost audible. "I—I have a favor to ask, Smith. One small favor."

"Anything, Luke."
"I want to see Evelyn."

I could see the dismay in Alita's face, but I went on.

"For old time's sake, Smith. You can understand that."

"Surely," he said. "I anticipated that you would, Luke. She's in the next room, right now." His eyes went to a doorway at the side of the room. "She's alone. Why not go in now?"

"All right." I looked at Alita. "Wait for me."

Her mouth was sullen, but I turned on my heel and went to the door. Before I touched it, it slid back to reveal a barren gray-walled room, with one chair. Rising to greet me was Evelyn. The door closed behind me.

What had I expected? What effect did I anticipate upon seeing Evelyn again? I didn't know myself.

She was lovelier than ever, but her loveliness seemed to have mellowed with time. There was no longer a star-brightness about her; she radiated a soft, golden light of a summer's moon. She was dressed simply, in white.

"Evelyn," I said.

"Hello, Luke. I'm so glad you came to our World."

"It's been a long time." I felt inane and foolish, my tongue thick and heavy.

"Yes, it has," Evelyn said.

"Are you—happy?"

"Very happy, Luke."

I frowned at the answer. I wanted to hurt her suddenly. I

said: "I'm married now, you know."

"So I've heard. I'm glad for you, Luke. They tell me your bride is very beautiful."

I took a step towards her.
"Evelyn—"

She must have seen what was in my eyes, because she answered: "Don't, Luke. Don't touch me. I love Smith. I worship Smith."

"Worship?" My mouth jerked at the word.

"Yes, worship. He's a God, Luke. I know that now. He's truly a God."

"You don't know what you are saying. He's got you hypnotized. You're playing Trilby to his Svengali—"

"You're wrong, Luke. He is a God." Her eyes shone. "You thought you knew Smith, but you didn't, not really. Nobody knows him as I do. If you could see the things he can do. He can appear and disappear at will, Luke. He is everywhere, anywhere. He can work miracles, Luke!"

"Tricks!" I said angrily. "You've been taken in by his tricks, Evelyn. He's got some gadget that projects his image around the place. He used it on me, one night back on Earth. It's only a machine—"

She shook her head, and there was an indulgent smile on her face. "You're wrong.

You don't know. You just don't know, Luke."

The door behind us slid open again.

"Was it a pleasant reunion?" Smith said, still standing behind the desk.

"Very pleasant," Evelyn smiled at him.

I walked back into the main chamber, trying to hide the emotion crossing my face. The door closed behind her, as if it were a vault closing upon some fragile jewel of great worth.

"Now," Smith said softly, "we can dine together."

"Yes," I said to Alita. "Now."

Her hand went to her hair, in a womanly gesture. But when her fingers emerged, they were holding a thin cylinder of bamboo. It was an ancient, primitive weapon, and strangely fitting to end the life of a super-scientist on his man-created world. She placed the cylinder to her lips, and a puff of her breath sent the poison-drenched splinter towards the figure behind the desk.

He continued to smile.

"I'm sorry, Smith," I said. "This had to be done."

Alita stared, waiting for his fall.

It didn't come.

Then Smith laughed.

"I apologize," he said. "There is no humor in this moment for you, I know that. But as for me, the spectacle is amusing. I must congratulate you on the simplicity of your attack. Other assassins have been far more clever in their techniques—and never got this far. But a blowgun and a poisoned dart—" He chuckled, but he didn't die.

"I don't understand," Alita gasped. "I didn't miss. I couldn't have—"

"No," Smith said. "You didn't miss, my dear."

Then I knew why our scheme had failed. We weren't looking at Smith at all; he hadn't trusted us to that extent. We were the guests of a spectral host; Smith's body was in another room of the citadel; our dart had whistled through a phantom image, electronically projected.

"I'm sorry to find you still an enemy," Smith said sadly. "I had hoped that things had changed between us, Luke. Now you leave me no other choice but to forget my debt to you."

Behind us, the white door was sliding open, and the Smith-officials were entering with drawn weapons.

It was a shock for me to realize that there was a prison

on Smith's World; it was an admission of imperfection and discontent. It was even more of a shock when I discovered that the subterranean cells, located some eighty miles from Smith's citadel, numbered in the thousands—and were all occupied.

Alita and I were separated, and I was marched through long stone corridors from one dismal chamber to another. There was little modernity in evidence; it might have been the catacombs of any ancient prison on Earth. It was damp and poorly-lighted, and the officials assigned to its ugly duties bore the same stamp of insensitive cruelty that marked jailers of every period in history. I was fingerprinted, photographed, and treated with callow disrespect. My head was shaved and my body deloused, and my first taste of the food in Smith-prison told me that my God-like friend had little interest in the well-being of those who broke his holy laws. My cell was cold; the walls wet; the cot sagging and springless; the light a naked bulb of meager wattage. It was more of a dungeon than a prison; a storage place for the human refuse of Smith's World.

But miserable as my life in Smith's prison was to be, it

was there that I discovered Smith's weaknesses as a God. And it was in the Smith-prison that I learned that Smith's World had an Anti-Smith League, too.

I determined that fact slowly, on those few occasions when the Smith-prisoners were permitted an exchange of low-voiced conversation. An elderly man, with a dragging left leg and a palsied hand, borrowed a cigarette from me one day and said:

"The Earth looks red tonight."

"What's that?"

"My cell window faces west; I can see the Earth glowing at night. It glows redder and redder all the time. They say a day will come when the Earth will bleed, and Smith's World will burn."

I thought he was feeble-minded, and began to move away. He put his arm on mine.

"No!" he said hoarsely. "You must listen carefully. You're new here." He peered at me more closely. "And your face is familiar. Did we meet back on Earth?"

I looked at him again. My throat tightened when I recognized Dr. Martin Corcoran, the brilliant biophysicist I had personally lured into Smith's service during my California

trip. I grasped his trembling hand, and asked his forgiveness.

"Only Smith is to blame," he said. "Smith and all of us who mistook him for a God. But he is a man, and an imperfect one. I have been here many months, in this prison, and I have learned more within these walls than I could have in freedom on Smith's World. I will tell you what I have learned, Mr. Wingate. Perhaps the facts will be useful to you some day."

"What did you mean?" I said, "about the Earth turning red?"

He looked about him cautiously.

"There are almost three thousand prisoners here. But this is not a criminal prison. Do you see what that means?"

"No."

"These are not thieves and murderers. These are rebels, rebels against Smith. Three thousand out of a population of less than two million. Can you imagine the great number still not discovered and imprisoned?"

"A revolt?" I stared at him. "But how? Why?"

"Why is the simpler question. You must have lived on Smith's World to know. You must have learned about your duties on this planet; duties

only to Smith, never to yourself, to your children, to your friends, to humanity. There are no churches on Smith's World; each building is a temple designed for the worship of Smith. Do you know how much of your mind, and your body, and your soul Smith demands? All of it, my friend."

"But how can you fight him? It's *his* world—"

"Perhaps. But many of us have decided to fight. To fight or to die. That is enough."

"And when will it happen?"

Corcoran shrugged wearily. "Younger bodies than mine must fix the date."

A Smith-guard approached us, and the old man fell silent.

As the weeks dragged on, I spent as much time as I could in Corcoran's company, listening to him tell of life on Smith's World: a world without end; a world where Nature was subservient to Man, and Man subservient to Smith. . . .

Then I met the others. Scientists, researchers, writers, engineers, artists, philosophers. There were two of the historians I myself had hired for Smith's World. There were four rocket-pilots among the prisoners, and what I learned from them was startling and deeply disturbing. I met them and I listened to them, and the

more I heard, the more I wanted to dig my way out of the Smith-prison, with my bare fingernails, if no other escape could be found.

One day, I spoke to Corcoran about escape.

He shook his head. "No, Luke. Smith has been careful. He has executed no prisoners, fearing repercussions from Earth. He is not yet strong enough to ignore Earth's enmity. But he has made certain that no escape is possible. The prison is ringed by a series of radioactive screens. Guards and prisoners arrive and depart by a single copter on the roof, and that is protected night and day, by a stringent security system. The precautions are great; no successful escape has been made."

"Then it's hopeless?"

"From within, yes. But I see the Earth from my window, and each day, it grows redder and redder."

Then he turned and shuffled away.

I had been in Smith's prison for eight months, when Evelyn came into my cell.

I thank God for the strength of the vessels that bring blood into my heart, for if there had been weakness there, it would have destroyed me that night. When I heard

the whispering sound within the cell, and stirred to see what caused it, the sight of Evelyn shocked me so greatly that I literally reeled and almost fainted.

But I recovered, and saw Evelyn, lovelier than ever, dressed coolly in white, her long blonde hair flowing behind her like a golden cloud.

"Luke," she whispered, tears glistening on her cheeks. "Luke, it's Evelyn. I must talk to you."

I couldn't speak.

"Don't be frightened. It's Smith's machine, his electronic projection device. I'm at Smith's citadel. Smith isn't here; there's some kind of trouble in the farmlands; he had to go there."

"Evelyn!" I gasped finally. "For the love of God, are you crazy?"

"Luke, listen to me. I have to explain something. I—I was troubled about what you told me, about Smith's ability to appear and disappear. I asked him point-blank after your arrest. He laughed and admitted it. He showed me the machine, taught me how to operate it—"

"Then you know he's not a God. Do you know that, Evelyn?"

She hid her face in her hands.

"I don't know anything, Luke! I'm so confused—"

I put my arm out towards her, my fingers aching to touch her. But I knew there was only air in the lovely body at the foot of my prison cot.

Then she straightened up and said: "Luke, I want to help you. He's talking wildly at you. He says you're the most dangerous man on his world. I don't know why he thinks that, but he does. He's fighting with himself over you, Luke. Part of him wants to save you, the other part wants to kill you. But he's beginning to change, Luke. All this trouble is changing him—"

"What trouble?"

"I don't understand it exactly. There have been strikes, riots, outbreaks. I don't know why; I don't see why people aren't happy. He's given them everything, Luke. Why should they not be happy?"

I sneered, but said nothing.

"There's some awful movement underway, Luke. There's been talk about a Bleeding Earth. I don't know what they mean by it, but it frightens me. There—there was another assassination attempt last week. It failed, of course. They always fail. But I'm so worried, Luke—"

She began to sob.

"Get hold of yourself," I said. "Did you mean that—about wanting to help me?"

"Yes!"

"Then you can get me out of here, Evelyn. You can get me out right now. Do the prison officials know you?"

"Yes."

"Then you can have me released. Make it a command, Evelyn; they'll listen to you."

She gasped. "They won't! Only Smith can order a release."

"Tell them your orders come from Smith. They're so frightened of him that they'll listen, Evelyn. Appear before the prison warden. He'll be afraid to disobey you, Evelyn; afraid of anyone so close to Smith as you are—"

She turned away.

"All right," she said at last. "I'll try, Luke."

That was how I made my escape from Smith-prison, the only man to accomplish the feat.

I had been gambling with the fears of the Smith-officials in telling Evelyn to speak for Smith, and the gamble had won. Within an hour after her visit to my cell, a trio of Smith-guards came and unlocked my door. They guided me to the roof of the prison, and a copter took me back to

the relative freedom of Smith's needle-shaped citadel.

I found Evelyn waiting for me in Smith's chamber. But the moment I saw her, I made a mistake. I asked:

"What have they done with Alita?"

Her moist eyes became dry and hard.

"I don't know. What does it matter, Luke? You don't love that woman. You married her as part of the scheme to assassinate Smith. That's the truth, isn't it?"

I didn't answer. I rubbed my heavy-whiskered cheeks and said: "I'd like to shave."

"In there."

In Smith's enormous bathroom, I took my first shower in eight months, and felt the good sensation of a sharp razor against my cheeks. I dressed myself out of Smith's private wardrobe, and came back to the Smith-chamber.

Evelyn was at the dome, looking at the glowing ball over our heads, the planet of our birth.

"It's so red tonight . . ."

"Red?"

I pushed her aside and looked out at the horizon of Smith's World. The sky was red, the clouds red, and even the speck in the sky appeared reddened by some mysterious distant fire.

"It is red," I said. "There are flames somewhere, flames to the east . . ."

"The farmland!" she whispered.

"They're burning the fields! Is that the trouble you meant?"

"I don't know!" She clutched at her throat. "Smith didn't tell me anything. He just said —trouble."

"It's started," I muttered. "The Earth is bleeding."

"Oh, Luke, I'm frightened!"

She was in my arms, soft and warm and yielding.

Neither of us heard the door sliding open behind us.

"Well," Smith said. "What's fair is fair, eh, Luke? Isn't that what the old Bible said? But of course. 'An eye for an eye' . . ."

I turned to face him, holding Evelyn behind me.

"Your world is burning, Smith."

He laughed. "So I understand. Nero's world burned, too, as I recall. But he managed all right."

Smith looked very fatigued. When he came towards us, his steps were faltering. Evelyn moaned at his approach, but he passed us by and went to the glass.

"What is it?" I said. "The Bleeding Earth?"

He smiled at me, wryly. "Then you know of my little rebellious movement? Yes, the Bleeding Earth. A pretty name for the renegades. Almost Biblical!" He put his head against the cool glass. "*And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.*" . . ."

Evelyn whimpered, and cowered against me.

"*...and Moses' anger waxed hot,*" Smith said. "*and he cast the tablets out of his hands, and break them beneath the mount.*" . . ."

Smith laughed, and turned to me.

"Now you see my mistake, Luke. Not to have continued with my evolution experiments. To have relied upon this sorry breed to people my new world . . ."

"Your world, Smith?"

He looked at me sharply. I pushed Evelyn aside and stepped towards him.

"Is it truly your world, Smith? Created by your marvelous world-building ma-

chine? Is that how it came into being?"

He said nothing.

"Or is it really God's world, Smith? Did you find that your fine machine didn't really work in the limits of space? That you weren't nearly so capable of creating planets as you thought?"

"What are you saying, Luke?" His voice was still unruffled.

"I know the truth, Smith. You never created Smith's World out of the dust of the cosmos. This was a God-created planet, Smith. Your ships captured and steered it into the orbital paths of this solar system; you didn't 'create' it at all. Am I speaking the truth?"

From the window, the sky blazed redder, and the crimson cast fell across Smith's face.

"You're a great scientist, Smith. No one denies you that. But you're not a God. Not nearly a God. You can make marvels, yes, but small marvels compared to the wonders of God. You can't make miracles, Smith. It's only a pose—a pose of your insane ego. You're crazy, Smith!" I was shouting now. "You're crazy!"

I never reckoned what effect my words would have on him. At first, all his reaction was in his eyes. They burned

out at me with such terrible rage that I was forced to look away. Then his hands started to jerk, his fingers moving convulsively, until he had to clench them into fists to stop their involuntary motions. Then he raised his arms above his head and began to speak. The words were unintelligible; but they were Holy Writ; I could tell that from their sonorous, rhythmical cadence; but his voice had lost all power to distinguish between vowels and consonants, words and animal sounds.

Then he lowered his arms, slowly, and spoke quietly to us, almost conversationally.

"It's all very well," he said. "This little rebellion of theirs. They think they're fighting for their freedom, but they're wrong. It's not freedom they'll win, Luke. Only death."

"What are you talking about?"

"The citadel. This building. They'll be coming here, finally. That's the logical thing for them to do. They'll storm it as the French stormed the Bastille, crying words of liberty and equality." He made a noise in his throat, and it was ugly. "But they'll be surprised, Luke. Terribly surprised at what happens."

"What about the building?"

"Why, it's not a building at

all. Not really. These are the only chambers, you see. Just these rooms, for Evelyn and myself. The rest of the structure is really a stockpile, Luke. An atomic stockpile; the final precaution you might say."

I went cold down to my feet; the very floor beneath me held a threat.

"You're lying," I said.

"I'm telling you the truth, Luke. If my rebels come here, they destroy Smith's World and themselves." He chuckled. "It was one of my best ideas, Luke. Don't you agree?"

I wheeled towards the window. The fire was angrier in the night sky, and my ears picked out the sound of voices below.

"We'll have to get out of here," I said. "Evelyn—"

She was looking at Smith, but she said to me: "There's a copter on the roof—"

"Then let's go—"

I grabbed her arm, but she jerked away from me. Her eyes were still fixed on Smith, and the God of Smith's World was going to his knees.

This time, his words were audible.

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O, my God, I cry in

the daytime but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent . . . ”

“Smith!” Evelyn shrieked.

“Look at his eyes,” I said.
“He can’t hear you now—”

“We must go, Evelyn—”

“I can’t! I can’t leave him.”

“You’ll have to leave him. If the mob reaches the citadel—”

“But he *needs* me, Luke!”

Now I heard the shouts clearly in the street far below. I tried again to make Evelyn come with me, but her arms were steel-strong around the stooped body of Smith.

I left her, and went to the roof.

There were people running everywhere in the streets when I brought the copter to ground. Some tried to climb aboard, shouting:

“To the spaceport! Please take me! The spaceships are leaving! I want to go home!”

The spaceships! The words struck me with their message of hope. If I could find Alita and reach the Smith-rockets before the mobs attacked...

Then I realized how hopeless it was. Alita was a prisoner in some unknown quarter of Smith’s World, and only minutes were delaying the eruption of Smith’s planet into atomic dust.

My mind rocked with the

decision I had to make. To leave Alita behind, and take my chance of getting to safety—or to search the unknown streets and terrain until the moment when the pile was triggered, and all problems ended.

It was then I realized that my love for Alita was no manufactured thing. I loved her for what she was, and I knew that I would never see her again.

I guided the copter back into the sky, and followed the running crowds to the spaceport of Smith’s World, and heard the rockets already beginning to explode, promising return to the planet of our birth and our true God.

These are my Smith-facts.

As you know by now, some sixty Smith-rockets left the planet before the atomic explosion that turned Smith’s World into a black cinder. And you know that Alita was a passenger aboard one of those ships, one of three hundred women prisoners released by the rebels. Even now, I cannot speak of our reunion on Earth without clouded eyes.

We have a son, Alita and I. He believes in God. We do, too.

THE END

TRICK OR TREAT

By CHARLES E. FRITCH

The darndest things can happen on Halloween. All those characters showing up at the door. And in those outlandish getups, a Neptunian makes as good a Martian as a Mercurian and actually, how many Venusians could tell the difference?

THE day's work done, Sam Woodford strode briskly through the chill October evening, a pipe trail of tobacco smoke in his wake. Around him, street lamps glistened in the crisp air, and dried leaves scurried before a breeze. As he thought comfortingly of the quiet evening ahead, his step quickened.

A bug-eyed creature suddenly leaped into his path, and he stopped, startled. A youthful voice cried, "Trick or treat, mister! Trick or treat!"

Sam pulled the pipe from his mouth and tried to look frightened. "My, how you startled me," he said. "You're a monster from the third moon of Saturn, aren't you?"

"Don't be afraid; it's only me, Mr. Woodford," the creature said. "Joey." And he pushed aside the long-nosed, large-toothed, bewhiskered mask to reveal a grinning young face covered with freckles.

"Well, so it is!" Sam declared, feigning surprise. "Tell you what, Joey. I haven't any treats with me, but you come around with your friends tonight. I believe Mrs. Woodford has something special prepared."

"Oh, boy!" Joey cried enthusiastically. "We'll be there, Mr. Woodford. See you!" And he scampered away.

Laughing, Sam watched the boy disappear into the dusk. He carefully placed the pipe-stem into its comfortable niche between his teeth and started walking again. Well, maybe the evening wouldn't be so quiet after all, he reconsidered. For tonight was the night when goblins prowled, when elves and pixies roamed the streets to ring doorbells for edible treasures. He chuckled softly to himself as he thought of it.

High in the sky a meteorite flashed. Or was it a witch on a

flaming broomstick? Or visitors in a spaceship from some other world? Or some fiery ghost resurrected for this particular Hallowe'en. On such a night all things were possible.

He hurried home, where Cora waited for him with a supper warm and steaming. They ate, and then he went into the parlor to settle into his comfortable chair with the evening newspaper. The invasion of the little people would not begin until later, so there was plenty of time to relax. The room was warm, the cool night was firmly shut outside, and he felt a drowsy contentment creep over him.

The doorbell rang.

At the shrill sound contentment fled, and Sam Woodford found himself annoyed with the unwelcome interruption. He shut his eyes and rattled the paper in his hands, as though this ritual would make the doorbell incapable of ringing again. He flexed his toes comfortably in their soft slipper-coverings and felt not the slightest urge to stir so much as an inch. From the kitchen came watery sounds of the evening dishes clattering from dirty to clean.

He opened his eyes and focused them carefully on a newspaper article telling of the latest development in

Earth's struggle to enter space by rocket—but his mind returned to whoever or whatever was outside the front door. Involuntarily he held his breath, waiting.

The doorbell rang again.

"Cora." He raised his voice. "Someone's at the door."

Dishes clinked. "Will you answer it, Sam? My hands are full."

Could it be the children so early, he wondered, at only a quarter after six? It was probably Joey, he decided, full of youthful enthusiasm and not realizing the older generation had better things to do than answer doors at impossible hours.

The doorbell rang, a bit more insistently this time.

"Sam." Cora's voice from the kitchen.

"Okay, okay," Sam said. "I'll get it."

He sighed, crumpled the paper, reluctantly elevated himself from the gentle confines of the chair, and stalked across the parlor into the hallway, where he threw open the door.

A young man stood on the front porch blinking from the sudden deluge of hallway light. At least a dozen years older than Joey, he had closely cropped hair, what looked like

an Elizabethan-period costume, and a hesitant smile on his face.

"Hello," the young man said brightly. "I'm a Martian."

Sam considered this statement. Finally he said, "Aren't you a little old for this sort of thing?"

The young man seemed perplexed. "Martians are all ages," he said, adding, "up to about one hundred sixty, anyway. I'm thirty-four myself."

"What I meant," Sam explained patiently, "is, aren't you a little old to go around dressed up on Hallowe'en playing games?"

The young man frowned. "Hallowe'en? Games?" he said, puzzled. "Maybe you didn't hear me correctly. I said I'm from the planet Mars!"

"Sure you are," Sam said, "and I'm from the planet Venus. Now, will you kindly state your business so I can get back to my newspaper."

"You don't believe me," the young man said, looking surprised and hurt at the discovery.

"The understatement of the week," Sam marveled. "Now, look," he continued, thinking of his comfortable chair, wishing he were in it, and trying to sound good-natured just the same, "I appreciate a joke,

especially on Hallowe'en, but you don't look like the kind of fellow to go around ringing doorbells just for fun. Are you selling brushes? Magazines?"

"I'm not selling anything," the young man insisted, a bit desperately. "I came in a rocket from Mars. The ship vaporized in your atmosphere, and I just managed to leap clear in time and come down by parachute a short distance from here. I picked your house at random and rang the doorbell."

"They have doorbells on Mars, of course."

"Of course." The man shrugged. "We have doors; why shouldn't we have doorbells?"

Sam shook his head. "No good, son. Even I know the climate on Mars is a great deal different from ours. If there were any inhabitants on Mars—which there aren't!—they'd have to be built differently, and you look more like an Earthman than I do. Besides, your English is much too good."

"I'm speaking Martian," the other said helplessly. "Can I help it if it sounds like English? Besides, Mars isn't so awfully different; just a little cooler, that's all."

"Why does everybody pick Mars to be from?" Sam won-

dered, somehow annoyed by this fact alone. "What's wrong with Venus for a change?"

"Fa," the young man said, waving a distracted hand. "Everybody knows there's no life on Venus. I tell you I'm a Martian."

Sam shrugged. "Okay, son, you're a Martian. Welcome to Earth. But right now, if you don't mind—"

The young man seemed very disturbed. "I just had a terrible thought. Suppose *nobody*'ll believe me? I can't prove I'm from another planet; all the proof was on the spaceship, and I've been sworn to not tell any of our secrets to you natives."

"You'll just have to wait until another rocket comes along to pick you up," Sam said. "Or else wait for the Earthlings to do something about space travel themselves. Meanwhile, you can easily pass as—" he chuckled—"as one of us natives."

"Thanks for the advice," the young man said sourly. "Thanks a lot."

"Not at all," Sam said generously. "You might try the corner house down there. Fellow's a flying saucer addict. It might be a good gag on him."

The young man nodded doubtfully and stepped into

the night. "I certainly didn't expect this kind of reception," he said sadly.

"You'll get used to it," Sam called after him.

He closed the door and sighed with relief. He chuckled then. Perhaps he really should not have been so grouchy; after all, this was the night set aside for such goings on. He shrugged, dismissing the thought, settled once more into his comfortable chair and unfolded the newspaper with a satisfied rattle.

"Who was that, dear?" Cora wanted to know, coming into the room. "I hope it wasn't the children; I haven't the treats made up yet."

"Some fellow dressed up as a Martian," he told her, not looking up.

"Oh," she said, suddenly interested. "You should have called me. I've never seen one."

"Neither has anyone else," Sam said, "'cause there aren't any. Besides, the costume didn't show much imagination. No tentacles, no bug-eyes, no death-rays—"

"Sam," Cora said thoughtfully. "Wouldn't it be funny if somebody from another planet actually *did* come down here—and nobody believed him?"

Sam grimaced. "You've been reading science-fiction," he accused.

"Guilty," she said, laughing, and then sighed stoically. "Well, I'd better finish those dishes."

Sam Woodford settled back again into the comfort of his chair and stretched his legs onto a nearby hassock. From the kitchen came sounds of resumed dishwashing.

He read the space-travel article and nodded in satisfaction. They were coming along quite well, these rocket men. Another ten or fifteen years and they'd put up the space

station. After that it would be a simple matter to go to Venus and Mars and see what *really* is there. Then would come the commercial rockets and the passenger spaceships.

He leaned back, eyes closed, to think of it. Travel between the planets. *That* would be the trip. He'd give a lot to be a passenger on one of those rockets. He didn't like to admit it, even to Cora who understood him more than he thought an Earthling could, but he was getting a bit homesick.

It would be good to see Venus again.

THE END



"It's up to you members of the press to stop this wild talk about the dangers of radiation from these tests."

BRIEF HUNGER

By G. L. VANDENBURG

Formula for a Broadway hit: Get a stinker of a play, hire a set of the most temperamental actors in the business. Then, just before curtain-time, knock the male lead's teeth out. Anyhow, it worked for Martin Gaumont.

OPENING TONIGHT!!!

Martin F. Gaumont

Presents

MARION FRIDAY

ARTHUR BURKE

IN

"BRIEF HUNGER"

IT WAS the largest sign on Forty-fourth Street. In New York that meant it was lost sight of if you got more than fifty feet away from it.

To Martin F. Gaumont, standing in front of the theater looking up at it, its bulbs radiated sheer magic. It was his forty-first production on the main stem but he treated all of them like they were the first born. Into "Brief Hunger" had gone his love, his care, his know-how,

his perception and two hundred other people's money.

The bald domed producer, aging, heavy built, imposing looking, was no longer the top man in his field. There was once a time when he could have persuaded the AMA to endorse patent medicines if it would have meant raising money for a play.

But Martin Gaumont had fallen on evil days. Five short years had seen him present fifteen straight flops. In a business where enemies are a dime a dozen and no man is worth his salt without an even gross, Gaumont was without peers. One more failure and the streets would come alive with a great legion of dancing enemies.

He watched the first nighters file into the theater, his



Front row seats didn't mean a thing—all the action
was taking place back stage!

coat collar up around his neck, his confidence sagging near his ankles. He wanted more than anything to leave the scene and jump off the Empire State building . . .

Backstage the usual placid, friendly atmosphere prevailed.

"Damn it all, Algy," the ultra-efficient stage manager barked at his assistant, "in case you've forgotten, we're opening tonight! And it is now twenty to eight. You should have called 'half hour' ten minutes ago! We take an early curtain tonight, remember? Where the hell is your mind, anyway?"

"I'm sorry, Chester," came the meek reply.

"And don't call me Chester! You know how Mr. Gaumont reveres tradition on an opening night. For God's sake be a little formal!"

"Yes, Mr. Burns," said the assistant. It was a concession he was loathe to make but jobs were scarce in the theater. There was no point in incurring the wrath of someone as pompous and self-important as Chester Burns.

"Well, don't stand there, Algy!" The stage manager was yelling at him, trying to adjust his temperamental bow tie and checking the key

pages of his prompt book all at the same time. "Go and call 'half hour'!"

Algernon Swanson felt about as wanted as a counterfeit nickel. He was an innocent looking kid, rather shy and with a habit of minding his own business. In the theater that made him a freak but he didn't care. His co-workers were sometimes shocked by a streak of indifference in him that bordered on mental paralysis. But he had just enough indifference to become a great star someday. That's all he really wanted.

He climbed the stairs and rapped his fist below the gold star of Mr. Arthur Burke's dressing room door. "Half hour, please, Mr. Burke."

Mr. Arthur Burke's voice, a dimensionless echo chamber with roots in his abdomen, answered in rich, crystal clear tones, "Thank you, Algernon!"

Algy's face became distorted at the sound of his full first name. His shoulders loomed up and consumed his neck until he resembled a turtle. Algernon! What an ass that Arthur Burke was! So obnoxiously formal! What a conceited, patronizing cluck he really was!

Algy puffed his way down the hall and knocked below

another gold star. "Half hour, please, Miss Friday."

The door opened. A thing of exquisite beauty, delicious proportions and very few clothes appeared. Her voice was a lyrical bouquet. "Thank you, thank you, darling Algernon!" She cupped his cheeks in her soft palms and tatooed his lips with a moist, infectious kiss.

When he opened his eyes the door was closed and she was gone. Marion Friday was the only one in the whole theater that was real, who treated him like a human being. Her face! Her body! Her smile! He wasn't indifferent to those. But he did wish she would stop that irksome habit of coming to the door with nothing on above her waist!

As he went up another flight of stairs his thoughts turned to "Brief Hunger." *What a dog of a play*, he thought. Martin Gaumont believed it was the greatest love story since "The Barrets of Wimpole Street." He deserved what was going to happen to him.

After announcing "half hour" to all of the cast Algy returned to the stage floor to find Gaumont waiting for him.

"Algernon, after you've called 'places' I want you to meet me at the back of the orchestra. Bring a pencil and paper with you . . ."

"What for, Mr. Gaumont?"

"If you'd let me finish I might be able to tell you what for!" He was a man who suffered a thousand deaths at the inadequacies of assistant stage managers. "You're going to take notes for me, that's what for!"

"But Mr. Gaumont, this is opening night and Chester . . . that is, Mr. Burns, the stage manager . . ."

Gaumont put a hand to his pained forehead and groaned. "Algernon . . ."

". . . he'll need me backstage . . ."

"Algernon . . ."

". . . to help him run the show . . ."

"ALGERNON!!"

"Yes, Mr. Gaumont?"

Gaumont opened his mouth to give the assistant unblemished hell but instead he turned to find out whose hands were clamped on his shoulder.

It was Arthur Burke, tall, erect, indescribably handsome and insufferably aware of it. He extended his hand to Gaumont and smiled until it looked like his mouth might never close again.

"Martin! Good luck! I can't tell you how indebted we all are to you. Good luck!" The words could have come from a wall bracket for all the feeling he put into them.

Martin Gaumont thanked him and left for the front of the theater, wondering why he ever hired such a conceited guy in the first place . . .

Fifteen minutes later he made the fatal mistake of returning to the backstage area to deliver one final note of cheer to his assembled entourage. It was five minutes until curtain.

Actors were checking props. Carpenters carried scenery and furniture. Electricians completed last minute focusing. The stage manager was checking onstage props. The actors were in the carpenters' way, carpenters were hindering electricians, electricians were obstructing the prop department and the stage manager was in everybody's way.

One look at the madhouse and Martin Gaumont turned on his heels, determined to sneak out without being seen.

"Oh, Mr. Gaumont!" Chester Burns yelled.

Caught, Gaumont said to himself. "Yes, Chester?"

"Electrics just had an ac-

cident. Short circuit. Most of the third bank will be out. Our exteriors will be pretty dark. Shall I hold the curtain?"

"What for?"

"While the boys send for new fuses."

"No, take the damned thing up," said Gaumont. He never should have come backstage and he knew it. This was the time everything always went wrong. "We don't have time to go shopping, Chester. If Mr. Burke and Miss Friday are any good they'll be able to play the scene with less light."

"I heard that, Martin!"

Gaumont wheeled around. Marion Friday was standing there in a beige cocktail dress that looked like it grew on her. Her eyes flashed with anger. Her opulent breasts were heaving up and down, a tactic she employed to frustrate tired business men. She had more beauty than brains but she knew enough to come in out of a squall. That's all she had to know.

"Now, now, Marion, I didn't mean it that way. It was intended as a compliment." Gaumont let out a fainthearted chuckle.

"Thanks!" Her voice was cold steel.

"We certainly don't want

to start bickering now, do we, Marion? Three minutes to curtain, you know." Gaumont's smile was pinned to both his ears.

"My dress is too tight," griped Marion. "I'm sorry, Martin, but something will have to be done about it before I can go on."

"Chester, do something about Miss Friday's dress," said the exasperated producer.

"And while you're at it," Arthur Burke had just descended the stairs, "do something about my tooth."

"What the hell's the matter with your tooth?"

"I had one pulled today and my new bridge hurts!" said Arthur petulantly.

"My dress comes first!"

"I don't know why! Mine is a physical disturbance. If you had a tooth . . ."

"Please, please!" Gaumont's stomach was slowly doing flip-flops. "The most important thing is the show, kids! The show! The thing that must go on, remember?"

"No!" the stars answered simultaneously.

Stars! Stars! Idiots, that's what they were! The bane of Martin Gaumont's existence. Even when you satisfy them they're not satisfied. One minute until curtain and

they're griping about the damnedest . . .

"Mr. Gaumont," the stage manager cut in, "the house lights have been dimmed to half."

Good for you, Chester, the producer glowed inwardly. That was just what a stage manager was for, he thought. To get producers out of simple minded arguments with even simpler minded actors. Gaumont looked at his watch as though the curtain couldn't rise unless he were in his seat. He gave each of his stars a snappy pat on the back and vanished with a last "Good-bye, kids, and good luck!" Having done with the proper clothes he left them.

He went to the back of the orchestra where Algy was waiting with pencil and paper. Wasn't this the way it was on an opening night? A nightmare of confusion and tempers? A million things going wrong? His old confidence surged up in him as the curtain rose. "Brief Hunger" was a good play! It was more than that. It was something the theater had needed for over twenty years; a down-to-earth, tender love story. There weren't enough of those anymore. And he, Martin F. Gaumont would make

theatrical history with this one . . .

The first fifteen minutes were met by the audience with mixed emotions: coughing, shuffling of feet, beard scratching, seat shifting and sneezing, all of which could be summed up under one general heading . . . boredom! The curse of the theatre.

Gaumont attributed this to the fact that his two stars had not yet made their appearance together. When they did he felt certain the show would get off the ground. He paced the back of the theater, Algernon following him like a faithful puppy dog.

The moment came.

The setting was a small island called Olympia off the coast of Maine. Marion Friday was playing the part of Jane Dexter, a girl sheltered from the outside world by a domineering father. Arthur Burke was a young artist, Brian Lowell, who had been commissioned by the old man to paint her portrait. They entered the living room of Jane's mansion:

JANE:

Brian, you were so quiet during our walk. What do you think of Olympia? Are you disappointed in it?

BRIAN:

No, I like it . . . because you live on it.

And you belong on an island, sister! Somewhere in the Arctic Ocean!

The mysterious bass voice had floated out of nowhere. It had a hollow ring to it and its sudden emergence galvanized everyone into silence. After saying his character's line Arthur Burke's lips had not moved. The audience was stunned. Martin Gaumont stopped pacing. Algy dropped his pad and pencil.

Marion Friday was at the point of apoplexy but she somehow managed to recover for her next line:

JANE:

I don't mean that. Do you like the island itself?

BRIAN:

I ought to love islands. I live on one.

JANE:

You never told me that. What's your island called?

BRIAN:

Manhattan.

You know it well enough, you shrew. You've gone through its male population like a dose of salts!

The voice again. Coming from nowhere. Some of the audience giggled but most of them remained confused.

Gaumont stood blinking his eyes. It was frightening to think that his sixteenth consecutive flop could come about in such a horrendous manner.

Marion Friday seethed inside. She walked upstage to Arthur Burke. Her back was to the audience as she whispered to him, "You cheap skunk! What are you trying to pull?"

"Marion, so help me," Arthur whispered back, "I don't know where that voice is coming from! So help me!"

They both turned to the audience. The play went on:

BRIAN:

You should come to New York sometime, Jane. I think you've been cooped up on this island too long.

Her cooped up? That's a scream!

JANE:

No, Brian. Father told me all I have to know about New York and its people. And I'm sure it's all true.

The author of this turkey is an Englishman. After that last line it's obvious why he didn't come to this country for the opening.

The audience was convulsed with laughter. Marion Friday turned the color of a cooked lobster. Martin Gau-

mont felt something forming on the inside wall of his stomach. It was growing by leaps and bounds. It was an ulcer . . .

Backstage all was confusion. The stage hands were rolling on the floor laughing. Chester was running around frantically looking for a hidden loudspeaker. During his search he had missed four light cues.

"Chester, what the hell is the meaning of this! What's going on?" Gaumont's eyes were sizzling as he barged through the stage door.

"Mr. Gaumont," said the frustrated stage manager, "I just don't know where that voice is coming from."

"Well you just find out, damn it, or I'll have a new stage manager tomorrow night!"

The two of them turned and listened as the laughing became more frequent.

"I'll be ruined, Chester!" cried Gaumont. "Ruined, do you hear me? You've got to do something! Strange voices don't just come out of a void, you know!"

"Mr. Gaumont, I'm doing everything in my power."

"Well, that's not enough," said the unreasonable producer. "Do you think I want

to be the laughing stock of Broadway tomorrow morning?"

"Think of me, Mr. Gaumont," pleaded Chester. "A stage manager is responsible for everything that happens on a stage!"

"Stop talking like a damn boy scout and do something!"

They listened again as a new wave of unrestrained laughter brought the rafters down.

BRIAN:

Darling, maybe I don't know what I'm trying to say. Or perhaps it's just that I don't know how to say it . . .

Oh, this dialogue is strictly squareville! Maybe that sexy brunette will still be at the follies bar after the show. What a knockout she was!

BRIAN:

. . . so let's just forget it and have a drink. A toast to us!

JANE:

Oh, I'm afraid I couldn't do that, Brian. You see, father frowns upon it so I don't drink.

You don't drink! What the hell do you use, a funnel? A sponge? How do you keep from drinking the stuff and still have a ninety proof breath?

Marion Friday could take no more. She started to storm off the stage. Arthur Burke took her by the arm and whispered to her. The laughter covered his words.

"Where are you going? The scene isn't over yet."

"If you think I'm going to sit there and take any more of those insults you're nuts!" She headed off stage.

"Remember what Gaumont said. The show must go on!"

"Are you kidding, Jack? Under these circumstances? This is nothing but one long, lousy practical joke! And I won't stand for it!"

The laughing subsided and Arthur Burke picked up the scene:

BRIAN:

Very well, we won't have a drink. How about one final sitting tomorrow?

JANE:

Will the portrait be finished then?

BRIAN:

I think so.

Going to be hung in Madame Tusseau's wax museum. Very appropriate.

Well, I have to be leaving. Will you walk me to the door, darling?

JANE:

I'll do better than that. I'll walk you to the mooring.

Just don't walk him to his bedroom. He isn't as young as he used to be!

Marion and Arthur made their exit amid tumultuous laughter. Chester and Gaumont were waiting for them in the wings.

"All right," Gaumont was chewing savagely on his cigar, "which one of you is responsible for this crummy gag?"

"How dare you!" For two cents Marion Friday would have clawed him to death. "You . . . you sneak! Sabotaging your own production with a . . . a gimmick that is beneath contempt!" She pointed her finger at him as her arm rose at a right angle with her body. It was a gesture she had used in a stock production of "Medea." "I'm going to sue you, Martin Gaumont, for defamation of character!"

"Now wait a minute, Marion. My reputation is at stake, too. I don't know anything about this."

"What reputation?" She put her hands on her hips and swayed her bountiful bosoms in front of him. "The one for producing fifteen consecutive flops? Ha! After this fiasco you'll be barking at carnivals where you began!"

Back to selling stale popcorn!"

"Let us take leave, Marion," Arthur said snobbishly. His left elbow formed a wing. Marion threw her head back and took his arm. Arthur said, "So long, cheapskate!"

"Where the hell are you going?" Gaumont asked.

"We're not going back on that stage, that's for sure!"

"Bless you, Arthur," said Marion. It was strange to see the two of them on the same side for a change. Usually they hated each other's guts, but only the strangest things bring enemies together. They began to walk away.

"Now, kids, listen to me, will you?" Gaumont followed them, his arms outstretched. "All right, so neither of you are responsible. Mark my word when I find out who is I shall sue until it hurts."

"Miss Friday, Mr. Burke," Chester interrupted, "you're on again."

The two stars kept walking in the direction of their dressing rooms.

"Kids, please!" said the horror stricken producer, "we're faced with a terrible crisis. All for one and one for all! That's the old motto, isn't it?"

"Crap!" they answered in unison.

The bums, Gaumont said to himself. *The only time they ever agree is when they disagree with me!*

"Look, I promise you this much. If this nonsense persists I'll get to the bottom of it by tomorrow morning. This thing will only ruin us temporarily, I guarantee that. I'll get word to the papers. I'm sure the critics will understand and come back tomorrow night."

"My dear Mr. Gaumont," Arthur rose to his full height, enunciating every word meticulously, "a critic wouldn't be sympathetic to a group of smoldering orphans."

Martin Gaumont fell to his knees. "Kids, be reasonable! Give old Martin a break!"

"Miss Friday, Mr. Burke, you're on!" insisted the stage manager.

Gaumont was in luck. In the final analysis Marion and Arthur were a couple of true-blue troupers. They couldn't resist the magnetic call of the colors. *Duty* lay ahead! They faced each other, chins up, heads high, proud to bear the label "actor" and, with great dignity, walked onto the stage.

Gaumont rose to a standing position and patted his stage manager on the back.

"Chester, you're all right. If this play is a hit remind me to give those two fatheads their notices. I'll be doing the American public a favor!" With that he went out to watch the rest of the play.

The next scene was in the den of Jane Dexter's mansion:

JANE:

(Sitting stiffly as Brian paints portrait) Brian, my back is killing me from sitting in this ridiculous position.

Quit squawking! This is the first sitting position you've used in years!

BRIAN:

Just another few seconds. Then I'll be finished.

There's a deathless line!

JANE:

Can I see it then?

BRIAN:

No, I have to take it to my hotel room and put the finishing touches on it.

You know, mustache, beard, bloodshot eyes and all that!

And so it went, continuing to convulse the audience, mortify Marion Friday, and feed Martin Gaumont's bulging ulcer. The only thing that no one could ascertain was whether the audience was laughing at or with.

When it was over the backstage area was swarming with more people than the stock exchange during the crash. Theories pertaining to the origin of the mysterious voice were bandied around like a baseball in infield practice. The theories ranged all the way from the voice of some dead actor to a microphone hidden in the bosom of a jealous ingenue.

For Martin Gaumont there was no way back to success. Only, as Marion had said, a direct route back to the carnival business. That prospect was enough to send him spiraling to the nearest men's room where he could conveniently become sick to his stomach. But, big man that he was, he braced himself, his cheek muscles tense as he faced his cast.

"Kids!" he said and paused for thirty seconds, "my heart is heavy. The horizon glitters only with disaster. The pot at the end of the rainbow contains naught but salty tears. The brass ring, our key to success, our open sesame to a long and fruitful run, has been denied us. No, not denied us!" His voice rose to a tremulous crescendo and cracked ever so softly. He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Not

denied us, but *taken* from us! Our cup runneth over with unemployment compensation. In short, kids, read the papers tomorrow morning. The critics are going to crucify us! Good luck to all of you. It's been . . . well, wonderful!"

He brushed a reluctant tear from the corner of his eye and dismissed his yawning company . . .

The following morning Martin Gaumont was propped up in his bed, a freezing icepack perched on his shining skull. He had prayed all night, the first praying he had done in thirty-three years, and it still hurt a little.

Algy, the assistant stage manager, brought the seven dailies to his bedside.

"Good Lord!" Gaumont exclaimed as he perused the *Gazette* critic's review. It was an unqualified rave. *Funniest and most unusual play of the season*, it said.

"I have always believed, Algernon . . . ALGERNON!" The assistant stage manager's head was buried in the morning baseball scores. "Are you reading the sports pages?" asked the shocked producer.

"Yes, Mr. Gaumont." Algy had thought the play was a

lemon before it opened and he still thought so, critics notwithstanding. A critic was only human anyway and every man was entitled to one monumental mistake.

"How, may I ask, during such a reverent moment can you take your mind off the theater? The play's the thing, Algernon. Always remember that."

"But, Mr. Gaumont," Algy beamed, "all the reviews are the same. The *Daily Record* says it's the most unusually original play in several years and the *Bugle* says . . ."

"Never mind, never mind you knucklehead! What the hell are you trying to do, ruin this beautiful morning?" He tore the *Daily Record* out of Algy's hands and propped it up in front of him. "You might at least let me enjoy the fruits of my own success!!"

As the second night audience drifted in Gaumont beamed proudly at the S.R.O. sign that hung over the box-office window. He was a man ten feet tall as he sauntered gaily to the backstage area, surveying his kingdom of spectators as he went.

"How's it going, Chester?"

"Places have been called, Mr. Gaumont."

"We're sold out, you know."

"Yes, I know. You certainly can pick 'em, Mr. Gaumont."

Gaumont stifled a phoney yawn. "Thanks, Chester."

The two stars came downstairs arm in arm. If smiles were made of money Arthur and Marion could have purchased the Pennsylvania Railroad. They were all teeth—grins from ear to ear.

"Martin, dahling!" gushed Marion, "what a man! What a showman! What a genius!"

"What can I say?" Gaumont puffed on a cigar. "I take it your dress got fixed?"

"Oh, Martin, dahling, it's perfectly divine"

"Good." He was just a little smug with Arthur. "Tooth feeling better?"

"Fine, Martin, fine. Certainly looks like we're in for a run, doesn't it?"

He flicked the ash from his cigar and tried to yawn again. "Shouldn't surprise me."

"Curtain going up!"

Gaumont stood at the rear of the house. His ulcer, born of disaster the night before, was now on the brink of surrender. What might have been his swan song in the theater had turned into the

piece de resistance of his checkered career.

When the curtain rose he began to daydream. The week's potential gross flashed through his mind. And the gross for the next week. And for the following fifty-two weeks. The beginning of a new era! Automobiles, swimming pools, parties, publicity, women, more plays, fame, fortune, vacations, Florida, Europe . . .

His mental wandering came to a sudden halt. Something was wrong. Arthur and Marion had been onstage for more than ten minutes of their first scene. There was no voice. No funny wisecracks. Most terrifying of all there were no laughs from out front. He waited. The scene went on. Martin Gaumont's mouth drooped. A cold cigar fell out of it. Arthur and Marion went off the stage. Gaumont prayed. In a few minutes they returned. He waited. Nothing.

He turned to Algernon who was taking notes again because nobody told him not to. "Algernon!" he said in a furious whisper, "Algernon, what the hell has gone wrong?"

Algernon was simple and direct. "Who knows?"

"Well, you don't have to be so damned blasé about it!"

The producer charged away as though his pants were on fire.

Algernon's face was expressionless. For the first time in his life his thoughts turned to cold-blooded murder . . .

The third act curtain fell and the audience left the theater like a herd of thirsty camels in sight of a water hole.

Gaumont went backstage. The atmosphere was as gloomy as an overstocked boneyard. The cast members were zombies drifting aimlessly to their dressing rooms. Two dozen minds with but a single thought: what the critics hadn't done to them, word of mouth would.

Gaumont laid the blame at everyone's feet but his own. Algernon didn't record on paper what the voice had said on opening night. Marion had paid off the voice because most of the remarks had been directed at her. Arthur was in collusion with Marion. Chester was at fault simply because he was the stage manager and everyone else was guilty on general principles.

He was lucky to escape the premises with his life . . .

By the following after-

noon the word had spread that "Brief Hunger" was one of Broadway's all time stinkers.

As one local wag put it: " 'Brief Hunger' is the closest thing to malnutrition since the Great Chinese famine. On Saturday it will become the first mercy killing in the history of the theater."

A columnist asked, "What did Martin Gaumont feed the critics that he forgot to feed his actors? Clover stems?"

The situation was critical. Gaumont knew he would have to find the origin of that voice. But how? Where? He racked his brain. Where the hell would you begin to look for a mysterious bass voice that had come from the void? Who could you ask? Was it a voice from the dead? Supernatural? Magic? Voodoo? He didn't have the slightest idea. A pounding headache and nine aspirins later he didn't care. He returned to his apartment determined to find the answer by reconstructing everything from the beginning . . .

Gaumont sat on the edge of the plush green chaise lounge in Arthur Burke's dressing room with his hands folded between his knees. Arthur was going through

the motions of putting on his make-up, but his heart and soul were not in it.

"I don't know, Arthur," said the despondent producer, "I just don't know!" He shook his head waiting for the actor to utter a consoling word.

Arthur kept his mouth shut.

"Well, don't you have any ideas?" Gaumont asked. "You are an intelligent human being, Arthur. Where do you think the voice came from?"

Arthur dropped the tube of Max Factor #27 and frowned at Gaumont in the mirror. "If I knew do you think I'd be applying my make-up like it was an embalming fluid? Really, Martin! I should think . . ."

"All right, all right, for heaven's sake, don't get temperamental!"

An uneasy silence fell over the room. The two men looked away from each other. Arthur went to the wash basin and took a tooth brush from its rack. He applied a generous coating of pink tooth paste to it, removed his bridge and set it on the sink.

"Arthur, you realize this is going to wash me up in the theater, don't you?" he said, squeezing salve from the tube of self pity. "I have been

unmercifully knifed in the back by an invisible Judas! Are you without feelings, Arthur? Just a kind word, that's all I ask. Then I'll quietly sink into oblivion and not bother you ever again."

Arthur paused, his hand poised with the loaded tooth brush before his mouth. "I'm sorry I got a little edgy, Martin. You're a good producer," he said grudgingly. With a swift motion he jammed the tooth brush into his mouth where it went vigorously to work.

"Thank you, Arthur. That meant a lot." Gaumont wanted to cry but the tears would not flow.

You mealy mouthed miser! If Internal Revenue knew how much money you've got stuffed in mattresses they'd burn you at the stake. Nobody'll sing any sad songs for you.

The voice was barely audible.

Gaumont's head jerked upward. "What did you say, Arthur?"

Arthur turned to him, puzzled and annoyed. "How-d-a hell could I shay shome-thin' when I gotta mouf fulla toofpashte!"

"But that was the voice, Arthur! I heard the voice!"

"You're crazy!"

Algernon knocked on the

door and called "places." Gaumont rose and excused himself, saying he had to check something with Chester.

Arthur was glad to see him go . . .

Gaumont and Chester were huddled together when Marion Friday descended the stairs.

"Well, well," she said, spying the producer, "how's the poor man's Belasco this evening?"

With an expansive smile Gaumont answered, "Couldn't be better, dear Marion!"

The actress stared at Gaumont, then glanced at the stage manager, "With hard times crawling under his door he shouldn't be talking like that, Chester. Has anyone taken his temperature?"

"Just wait, Marion," said Gaumont, "wait and you shall see!"

"I'll see you around the graveyard," came her biting reply. She retired to a corner chair with a pocket edition of Kraft-Ebing.

Martin Gaumont hummed joyously as the curtain went up.

Several minutes passed.

Arthur Burke came downstairs. He sat in a chair adjoining Marion's. Neither of

them looked at the producer. Their attitudes suggested that they would rather have been trapped in a burning hotel than sitting where they were.

Gaumont waited until Chester gave them their cue to get ready. Then he approached them. "Well, kids," he paused interminably, "I think we're going to be all right! Yes, I . . ."

"Martin?"

"Yes, Marion?"

"Would you do me a favor?" her voice was at its brashest.

"Of course, my dear, what is it?"

"Here!" she slapped a nickel into his palm. "Get yourself a *Times* and check the want ads. Maybe you could try your hand at window cleaning." She turned to her leading man. "Come along, Arthur."

Gaumont was unruffled. "Arthur, wait just a moment. Have you got your bridge in?"

"Of course I have," sighed Arthur.

"I'd like you to take it out."

"What on earth for?"

"No time to explain now. Please take it out."

"Absolutely not!"

The only punch Martin

Gaumont had ever thrown was from a highball glass at a garden party on Long Island. But he was confident that this one would be accurate for it went without saying that Arthur wouldn't have the presence of mind to step aside.

The blow landed on the actor's jaw, dislodging his bridge and jarring the foundations of two molars and one bicuspid. The actor went reeling to the floor. Gaumont stooped over and pried the bridge from his mouth. But not before Marion had let go with a wallop that blackened one of his eyes.

"How dare you strike poor Arthur," said the actress. She helped her stunned leading man to his feet.

Gaumont soothed the side of his face with his palm. His other hand pocketed the bridge. "And you call yourself a lady!" he exclaimed.

Arthur recovered from the blow. He broke away from Marion and started for Gaumont. The producer put on a pair of thick lens glasses and took an indignant step backwards.

At that moment Chester intervened and swung the onrushing Arthur around to follow Marion onstage. The handsome actor, realizing his

call to duty far outweighed his lust for revenge, went forth to play the scene . . . reluctantly.

Martin Gaumont might easily have explained everything to the actor much earlier but from the day "Brief Hunger" had gone into rehearsal he had been consumed by an overwhelming desire to plant one right in the middle of Arthur's face. He felt better now.

"Mr. Gaumont," the stage manager scratched his head, "I still don't understand. What? Why . . . ?"

"Never mind, Chester. Let's just relax and watch. I think Mr. Arthur Burke is going to give us an inspired performance."

They looked toward the stage.

Arthur Burke, portraying the young artist, was behaving more like a deranged scientist, pacing back and forth, gnashing his teeth, savagely plucking petals from a prop flower.

JANE:

Brian, you were so quiet during our walk. What do you think of Olympia? Are you disappointed with the island?

I wish the producer of this play lived on it. I'd string his hide up to the nearest pine

tree and go into the tanning business.

BRIAN:

No, I like it because *you* live on it.
And I'm not really delirious about that!

While the audience laughed Marion managed a surface chuckle and rammed her soft fist gently into Arthur's belly.

Arthur doubled up and with what little wind he had left said "witch" under his breath.

JANE:

I don't mean that. Do you like the island itself?

BRIAN:

I ought to love islands . . . *But I don't! I hate them! And I hate producers, playwrights and actresses. . . .*

. . . I live on one.

JANE:

You never told me that. What's your island called?

None of your damn business!

BRIAN:

Manhattan.

Don't tell me you didn't know. You have a daddy living on every corner!

Any members of the audience who had shown up in spite of the word of mouth must have thought the second night audience consisted of nothing but religious prudes.

"Brief Hunger" was unquestionably a very funny play . . .

When the act was over Arthur Burke stormed off the stage ready to indulge in premeditated butchery. "Where is he! Where is he! I'm going to kill that bald headed, pot bellied egomaniac if it's the last thing I ever do. I'll be doing the theater a favor!"

Chester and two stagehands grabbed Arthur from behind. They held his arms as he struggled to free himself. When the three men appeared to have the situation well in hand Gaumont slipped out from behind a curtain.

"There he is! Let me at him!!"

"Now, now, good friend, Arthur! There's no . . ."

"Don't you 'good friend' me, you lousy . . ."

"Arthur, I only did what I had to do. The mysterious voice was yours, don't you see?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Arthur stopped struggling.

"Well, frankly I'm not sure that even I understand it. But I went home this afternoon and did a great deal of thinking."

"That must have hurt a little," said Marion.

"The voice had only spoken while you and Marion were on stage. Inasmuch as the voice was male I was left with but one conclusion. You had to be responsible. That opened up two possibilities. You were either doing it deliberately or subconsciously . . ."

"Oh, for God's sake, get to the point!" cried Arthur.

"When I was in your dressing room earlier you took your bridge out. I heard the voice. I remembered on opening night how you had complained the bridge was hurting you. You took it out and set it on a backstage table during the performance. The voice was 'on' that night. Last night your mouth felt better. You wore the bridge. No voice. Tonight I took the bridge away from you. The voice came back."

"Oh, I see!" Arthur spoke sarcastically. "It's all the fault of a little empty space in my mouth, is it?"

"Figured it out all by myself!" Gaumont replied.

"Let me at him!" Arthur was like a tiger again. "Let me at that crazy good for nothing!"

Gaumont paled as Arthur almost freed himself, but Chester and the stagehands held fast.

"Arthur, you have to admit that stranger physiological things have happened. You see," he said expertly, "the nerve tissue where your tooth used to be was extremely sensitive. Like all people who have teeth extracted you developed the immediate habit of glossing over that area with your tongue, thereby establishing contact between the nerve tissue and your own subconscious. Your thoughts were becoming audible. Really quite simple, my boy."

"Why aren't my thoughts audible right now, you moron!"

"Because right now you have no subconscious. You are saying exactly what you think." He produced the bridge. "Here. Put this back in and pull yourself together."

Arthur put his bridge in. He didn't pull himself together.

Gaumont turned to Chies-
ter, the stagehands, Marion
and sundry others who had
been attracted by the ruckus.
"Well, kids!" there followed
that dramatic pause, capable
of putting three cast mem-
bers to sleep. "I think we're
in for a run. Did you hear
that audience? They were
helpless with laughter! Putty
in our hands! Ours is the

success of which dreams are
made! To think . . ."

Martin F. Gaumont didn't
know what hit him. All was
eternal darkness save for a
few technicolored stars each
of which bore a resemblance
to one of his many adver-
saries. Then came the clouds.
Dense formations of swirling
mud-gray clouds that seemed
to come closer, closer, closer
until they were about to
swallow him. Then nothing.
Nothing but a thousand ex-
cited voices, all going at once
and countermanding one an-
other. It was twenty minutes
before they were able to
revive him.

He opened his eyes and
found himself stretched out
on a makeshift bed of
four straight backed chairs.
"What in God's name hap-
pened?"

He heard the brassy clang
of Marion's voice, "You were
just about to auction off the
Pearly Gates, mastermind,
when Arthur Burke hauled
off with a haymaker. You
went out faster than any-
thing since Moxie."

"Chester, help me to my
feet. I am going to have the
rare pleasure of telling Mr.
Arthur Burke that he is
fired!"

"You're too late. He's al-

ready quit. Left the theater ten minutes ago. He told us to tell you," said Marion.

"Maybe we'd better send for him, Mr. Gaumont," Chester sounded worried. "That voice of his is valuable to the success of this play."

"Nonsense, Chester, my boy. I took the trouble of having Algernon take down everything the voice said this evening. I'll have another leading man, and a better actor, record the additional dialogue. For future performances we'll play it over a loud-speaker." Gaumont reached for a cigar. "And to hell with Arthur Burke!!!"

"Brilliant, Mr. Gaumont, brilliant!" said Chester.

"It was nothing."

"I can believe that!" Marion put in.

"By the way, where is that idiot assistant of yours, Chester? I want those notes right away."

The stage manager was ruffled. "Why, I . . . I don't know. He was here while you were unconscious and then he left right after Mr. Burke . . ."

Algy appeared at the stage door. "You wanted me, Mr. Gaumont?"

"Ah, Algernon! Where are the notes?"

Algernon adjusted his horn-rimmed glasses. He didn't flicker an eyebrow. "What notes?"

"The notes, boy, the notes you took of everything the voice said!"

"Oh, those notes!"

"Yes, of course. Give them to me."

"I don't have them."

"Oh. Well, in that case . . . YOU DON'T HAVE THEM!!" Gaumont felt something weird growing on the inside wall of his stomach. The return of the ulcer! "Good God, you mean you've lost them?"

"I'm sure I'll be able to find them again. That is, if you'd be good enough to step out into the lobby with me, Mr. Gaumont."

"What for?" Gaumont smelled a rat.

Algernon said nothing. He just smiled. It wasn't a vicious smile. Just one that said he was fed up with the likes of Martin Gaumont and was glad to have the upper hand this once. Then he headed for the lobby. Gaumont and his curious company followed.

The producer let out a blood curdling scream when he saw the posters in the lobby. His face turned purple, even Martin Gaumont couldn't speak.

MARTIN F. GAUMONT
presents
MARION FRIDAY
and
ALGERNON SWANSON
in
"B R I E F H U N G E R"

As usual Algernon's expression was completely blank. "I rather like the printing, don't you? I took a course in high school. A few months ago I printed up these slips with my name on them. Good thing I did. All I had to do was paste them on over Arthur Burke's name."

"How dare you! How dare you, you little bastard! Now give me those notes!!" Gaumont was livid.

"It's funny," said Algernon, "how I forgot what became of those notes. Gee, it'd be terrible if I ever forgot lines like that. But in this show I don't have to worry. All the best lines will be coming over a loudspeaker. All I have to worry about is making love to Miss Friday." He blushed and added, "On stage, of course."

"Martin," said Marion,

running her fingers up and down Algernon's back, "don't look now but I don't believe you have a leg to stand on. I think Algernon would be a divine leading man."

"Oh, shut up, Marion!" Gaumont turned to Algy. "All right, you dirty little black-mailer, you've got what you want."

"Look, who's calling the kettle black!" said Marion.

"Gee, thanks, Mr. Gaumont." Algernon produced a run - of - the - play contract, which he just happened to have with him. Gaumont signed it, gave it to Algy and took his notes.

There wasn't much dignity to salvage but Gaumont tried. "I am now going to my apartment," he said, "where I just might indulge in my first game of Russian Roulette." He disappeared through the lobby doors.

If he had bothered to look back he would have seen Marion Friday lost in the arms of the assistant stage manager who was smothering her with hungry kisses. A go-getter, Algernon Swanson, a real trouper.

THE END



In their conditioned minds the restrain around them seemed real.

THE BLUE PLAGUE

By

ROBERT SILVERBERG

What would you do if you came home and found your wife missing and discovered she'd gone off into space to understudy a guinea pig? Well, that's just what Dave did—but the doing was rougher than you'd expect.

IT WAS a Wednesday morning, early in September of 1962. I thought it was a perfect early-autumn morning, as I caught a cab and headed for the laboratory. Bright, crisp, clear, with a tang in the air. I didn't know then that an undeclared war was scheduled to begin before nightfall—a war calculated to wipe out all humanity.

I started to find that out at lunchtime, when I tried to call my wife.

I dialed, let the phone ring six or seven times. No answer. "Funny," I said.

"What is it?" Joe Harper said. He's in my research group at the electronics lab.

"That my wife doesn't answer. She's always home at noon when I call."

"Maybe the iceman's there," Joe suggested, grinning.

"No—be serious, you idiot. I'm supposed to tell her whether or not the Cooks are coming for dinner tonight, so she can prepare enough meat. She said she'd be around at noontime for my call."

"Then she forgot."

"Uh-uh. Kate doesn't forget things like that—not if it has anything to do with supper. Damn it, now I'll have to keep calling until she comes in."

We were working on a tricky and delicate radar problem, and I knew it would be a nuisance to keep making phone calls and interrupting the work. Annoyed, I dialed again, and held the receiver for eight rings before dropping it.

"Call a neighbor," Joe said.
"Relay the message."

"Good idea." I dialed Mrs. Cowan's number. She's our next-door neighbor, and I figured I'd have her ring Kate up on the housephone and pass the word along about supper.

I listened to the phone ring a while, then put it down numbly.

"Hey — you sick?" Joe asked.

"Mrs. Cowan's not home," I said.

"So? Maybe the iceman's busy. Or maybe she and your wife went for a walk."

I shook my head. "Mrs. Cowan's got arthritis. She uses a wheelchair. And she never goes out of the house. Never. Something's up, Joe. I don't like it."

"Try calling someone else in the house, Dave."

I shook my head. "Just wasting time. If my wife's not home, and Mrs. Cowan's not home, there's a good reason why. I'm going to take a long lunch hour today, Joe."

A perspiring twenty minutes later I pulled up in front of our house, handed the driver a buck, and scrambled out and into the building.

I couldn't wait for the elevator. I sprinted up the four flights of stairs, arriving

winded in front of our apartment door. Even then, I remembered to wipe my feet on the mat. It's funny how little domestic habits stick with you.

I opened the door.

The place looked like Hurricanes Alice, Betty, Charlotte, and Zenobia had been through it.

Drapes were pulled down, chairs were overturned, a lamp had fallen. It looked as if Kate had been dragged bodily out of the apartment.

I picked up the phone, dialed the police, and said, "My wife's been kidnapped." I gave my name and address and hung up. The words seemed to float on the air, strangely unreal and dreamlike—nightmarish.

The air. There was something funny about the air—something fishy, rather. Literally. The odor of fish hung around the apartment.

Kate hates fish. So do I.

I started to investigate the place. The trail of debris started in the kitchen, where she'd been fixing lunch. There was an omelet lying overturned on the floor, and a skillet nearby.

I picked up the skillet. It still had grease in it, and a few fragments of egg. And there was something green and sticky on one side of the

rim. Something like green blood, I thought.

Green blood? What the hell—

They had dragged her out of the kitchen, through the foyer, through the living room, and out the front door. She had tried to grab on to anything and everything as she went. I found myself quivering, shaking all over.

The doorbell rang. In the state I was in, I almost jumped out of my skin.

But it was only the police—three of them.

"I'm Detective Feuerman," the biggest one said. He glanced around the apartment. "Want to tell me all about it?"

I told him all I knew, which wasn't much. As soon as I mentioned Mrs. Cowan, Feuerman sent his two aides to investigate the rest of the floor.

They returned shortly. "We canvassed the whole floor, Chief. There's no one home in any of the apartments along this side of the corridor, and no one on the other side knows anything about anything."

"Okay," Feuerman said. He looked at me. "We'll get right to work. These damned New York apartment houses, where people could be getting sawed in half alive and no one would bother to notice! Can I have

some photos of your wife, Mr. Martin?"

Eventually, they left, promising to find Kate immediately if not sooner. I didn't put much faith in their assurances, but it made me feel better to know someone was looking.

I realized I had forgotten to show them the green substance on the side of the skillet. Just as well, I thought. They'd only ignore it.

I moved around the apartment methodically, straightening up some of the mess. When I was through, I called the lab, and informed the switchboard operator I wasn't coming back that afternoon.

Then I slumped down in my big armchair and let the nervous reaction sweep over me.

Kate was gone, just like that. And so, I was willing to bet, were Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Ludwig, and the rest of the people on this side of the floor. It was as if they had been collected.

Collected. Fishy odor in the air. Green stuff on the skillet. *Take it easy, Dave*, I warned myself. *It's only 1962. The spacemen haven't invaded us yet.*

Or have they?

I went to the sideboard and poured a drink with shaky

fingers, wondering if Kate were dead or alive or halfway to Alpha Centauri by now. Detective Feuerman would have a nice job trying to find her if that—

Ease up, Dave. Ease up.

I gulped the drink, and poured another. Then I corked the bottle and put it away. I was loopy enough by now without getting drunk on top of it.

Kate—

Green blood. Fish-smell. And half a floor of people kidnapped.

I decided I needed some fresh air. I locked up the place and went out into that lovely September day. Only it didn't seem so lovely now.

The street seemed sickeningly familiar. Sickeningly, because life went on calmly all around, in the apartment houses that mushroomed up on every side, in the laboratory building across the street, in the park and in the stores. Everywhere but in my house, where the normal flow of life had come to a jarring break-point.

I started to walk, just to be moving, just to be doing something. Down the block, across the street, up again—silly mechanical motions. I wondered if I should return to the apart-

ment and wait there, wait for the phone to ring and Detective Feuerman to say, "We've found your wife and she's okay."

But I didn't want to go back to the apartment we'd lived in together. Not yet. Not just yet. I wanted to walk around, to let the shock drain out of my system, to—

I stopped and looked down at the colored bit of cloth that lay at my feet. It was a strip of green iridescent cloth about three feet long or so, and a couple of inches wide: the belt from some woman's housecoat, no doubt.

With trembling hands I picked it up and examined it. It was made of reylon, that new, practically indestructible plastic that went on the market last year. Kate owned a reylon housecoat, in green. I bought it for her birthday, six months ago.

And this was the belt of Kate's housecoat lying here. I looked up. I was in front of a big, closed door, and the sign over the door said, *Northern General Laboratories, Employees Only.*

The lab was new; a year ago, the building had been an abandoned warehouse. No one quite knew what sort of research was carried on inside it. No one cared, in fact.

But suddenly I cared. I knew with all my heart that Kate was inside that building, and I wanted in.

Stuffing the housecoat belt into my pocket, I walked around the building, looking for the front entrance.

There wasn't any. So I went to the employees' entrance, and tried to open the door. No dice. I knocked, and no one heard. It was like trying to storm a fortress.

But there were other ways of getting inside a laboratory, I knew.

I waited a few minutes, glancing at my watch. It was a little after one in the afternoon. Maybe an employee returning late from lunch—

Yes. A man appeared as I stood there, youngish-looking, probably a technician of some kind. He touched a key to the door and it sprang open. I stepped swiftly in behind him, before the door closed.

He turned. "I'm sorry, but—"

Smoothly I said, "I'm the sales representative for Consolidated Labs. I have an appointment with your director. I wonder if you—"

A girl came gliding up to us, wearing a severe one-piece dress without ornament. "I'll handle this," she murmured to

the man who had inadvertently let me in. Turning to me she said, "Yes, please?"

I produced my Lab identification badge. "I'm David Martin of Consolidated Labs. Your director is expecting to see me on a very urgent matter."

I hoped it would work. The place looked busy, what I could see of it: men moving back and forth on mysterious errands, carrying boxes, tubes, apparatus. Further in the background I saw a staircase and a closed door.

"Our director? Very well, Mr. Martin. Come with me."

She moved away, gliding as if her feet were oiled, and led me through a winding passageway and down a long corridor lined with office doors.

"Which floors are used in active research?" I asked. "I'd very much like to look around the place, if regulations permit—"

"In here, please, Mr. Martin," she said, ignoring my hopeful question. She pressed a panel and one of the office doors opened.

I entered. The room was totally bare—not even a desk or a chair in it. Just four empty walls, and no window. I didn't like it.

"Hey! What's the idea of—"

"Our director has no appointments for this afternoon, Mr. Martin. Therefore, you're here for some other purpose. Please don't attempt to escape; you'll find it's quite impossible."

I made a leap for the door, but too late. It slid smoothly closed, and the last thing I saw before it clanged shut was the girl's smiling face.

I pounded on the door. No go. It was sealed without a crack, and there was no handle. I was neatly trapped, in an escape-proof cell.

But one thing was certain: Kate was somewhere else in the building. That fishy odor was all over the place, that repugnant smell I'd first encountered in our apartment.

Only how to find her? How to get out?

A sudden sweetish odor hit my nostrils. I heard a hissing sound coming from above. I looked up.

There was a grille in the room's ceiling, twelve feet above me. A yellowish gas was issuing from that grille, coming hissing out and filling the room.

I coughed. There was no way to reach the grille, no way to prevent the gas from filling my lungs, no way . . .

I remember slumping over,

retching, sucking in breath, thinking, *This is what the gas chamber's like. I'm going to die. I'm going to die.*

But I didn't die.

I woke up, instead—feeling as if I'd been disemboweled, or drawn and quartered and put back together again. I knew I'd been gassed.

I dragged in breath, trying to clear the gas from my lungs, and blinked my eyes. For one dizzy moment I thought I was back in my lab: there were lab benches, tables ful of apparatus, lockers, paraphernalia.

But as my mind cleared I saw I was still somewhere in the building—in *their* lab. I was in a cage of some sort, made of a transparent, nearly invisible substance.

"Dave?"

I turned. "Kate!"

She was in the next cage. Her clothing was torn, and her eyes were red from crying. Further down I saw Mrs. Cowan, still in her wheelchair, and two or three of our other neighbors. I was in the end cage, since I was the newest acquisition to the collection.

"How did you get here, Dave?" The walls of the cages didn't seem to inhibit transmission of sound.

"I—came home and found you were gone. Then I went

for a walk. Your belt was in the street outside this building."

"Oh." In whispers, she told me what had happened: how the doorbell had rung, how four young men had forced their way in, trapped her in the kitchen, dragged her away. "I hit one of them with the skillet," she said. "He bled —green."

"I know. I saw it. What is this place, anyway?"

"We've been here almost two hours," Kate said. "I don't know what's going to happen. I'm afraid, Dave! I—don't think they're human!"

"We'll find out." I looked around. A few of the smooth-faced labmen were moving around, with equipment of a strange and incomprehensible sort. My skin grew cold. I was an engineer; I was trained to deal with electronic apparatus. But I didn't recognize any of the gadgets I saw here. They were alien, frightening, bizarre.

Right in the middle of Manhattan, I thought. The aliens have landed and no one even bothered to look.

"What do you think they want with us, Dave?"

I shrugged. "I don't know, honey. I don't know."

But I had seen too many labs not to know. We were

penned in these cages like experimental animals.

We were guinea pigs. Human ones. Lord only knew how they planned to use us.

I counted eight of us, in a row of cages. Waiting. Waiting—for what?

Pressing my finger against the wall of the cage, I noticed an interesting blurring effect—as if my finger were sinking into the wall, to the depth of a couple of molecules. I pushed harder, but no go.

My electronics - engineer mind started clicking. The wall might behave that way if, instead of being a new plastic, it were a force-field of some kind.

And if it were a force-field, there would have to be a generator—

"Attention, please," said a calm, dispassionate voice. I glanced up and saw a smooth-faced young man facing the row of cages.

"That's him," Kate whispered. "One of the ones who came to get me!"

"Doubtless you eight have been wondering why you are here," the young man said. "Since you are about to take part in a most important experiment, I think it's only fair you know what is going to happen."

"Experiment?" Kate repeated.

I nodded coldly. I had guessed as much.

"To begin," the young man said, as coolly as if he were delivering a scientific lecture, "to begin, I should inform you that we of Venus have had this laboratory in operation for some three months now."

Venus!

"I think I should add that this is not our natural form, but a carefully-devised imitation of your bodies. Our real appearance is something quite different."

It all hung together now, the green blood and the fishy odor, the smooth way these people walked, the alienness of the laboratory equipment. But—*why*?

"The basic situation is this: Venus is greatly overcrowded, and we must expand our living area. Earth seems an ideal world for this purpose. But, of course, Earth is inhabited—and so, if we are to colonize here, we must first dispose of those inhabitants."

Just so, I thought. Cool, scientific, emotionless—and utterly evil.

He went on: "In order to do this most efficiently, without causing widespread confusion and possibly touching off a lengthy and costly struggle,

we have established this laboratory as our first beachhead on Earth. For the past three months, we have been experimenting with various organic life extinguishers: virus diseases of one type or another, cancers, and so forth. The aim is to produce a short-lived, quick-acting airborne disease which will wipe out all Earthly life in a period of hours, leaving it free for Venusian colonists and livestock.

"Most of the methods we have devised have been too slow-acting or too easily counteracted. However, you have been brought here today to serve as living test-animals for the method we feel stands the greatest chance of success. Experiments indicate that XV-106 will cause destruction of life within minutes after infection, in the most efficient manner. XV-106 has yet to be tested on human beings, of course, but should it prove successful we intend to circulate it in Earth's atmosphere by nightfall. In less than 24 hours we may control Earth."

Just as simple as all that, I thought. The scientific attitude carried to the utmost: even to the point of delivering a little lecture to the guinea pigs before experimenting on them.

Kate's pale, frightened face turned to me. "Dave—"

"Don't worry, honey. At least . . . at least it'll be quick. They say so."

But it was a pretty feeble attempt at humor. I stared at that smug human mask and wondered what alien horror was behind the youthful, handsome face of the "technician." Then I looked back at Kate. "We'll get out of here," I said. I ran my fingers along the cage wall, feeling the intermolecular penetration. It had to be a force-field; there was no other explanation. . . .

"Above each of you, you will notice a globe containing blue vapor. This represents a concentrated solution of XV-106, in a quantity sufficient to extinguish life. We will open these globes by remote control and observe the results."

I saw half a dozen other aliens appear, looking interested and serious. They were carrying notebooks. It was fantastic: they looked like earnest college kids doing a chemistry experiment, not like alien beings going about the job of destroying a world.

"We will now open the first globe."

I looked up. The globe was sitting about two feet above my head, embedded in the top

of the force-field cage. It looked like a little blue tomato, but I could see the hinge lines where it would split to release its deadly poison.

I tried to ignore Kate's sobs of fear. I was scared silly myself, but I was trying to stay level-headed, not to give up, not to stop thinking of a way out. . . .

If only they didn't begin with me! If only I had a few minutes more!

"Look!" Kate screamed.

I looked.

They had opened the eighth globe, the one furthest from me. There was a woman in that first cage, someone from our building. I never knew her name. I wasn't ever going to get to know it, either.

The blue cloud came spiraling down and dissipated itself in the atmosphere of the cage. I counted five seconds—*thousand-one, thousand-two. . . .*

On *thousand-five* the woman in the cage let out a piercing shriek.

And fell apart.

It was the only way to describe it. Her skin turned gray in one second and sloughed away like so much modelling clay the next second. The devils from Venus knew their biochemistry, all right. A quicker-acting biological poison had never been imagined.

I stared numbly at the pile of bones in Cage Eight. The alien observers were gathered around, clucking approvingly, scribbling notes. The project was a howling success. I compared it with a group of biologists examining white mice they had successfully injected with leprosy, and nodding over their triumph. They felt no guilt—why should they?

And neither did these Venusians.

"We will now open the second globe," the calm voice said.

Globe two hung over the head of a plump woman in her fifties. This time, I didn't look—but I knew from Kate's little gasp what had happened.

I pictured the stuff spreading out in billowing waves through Earth's atmosphere. Within hours, the world would be a charnal-house.

Closing my eyes for a moment, I tried to think, tried to remember that paper I'd read in the electronics journal a couple of months before: *Force-Field Theory and Its Applications*, or something like that. I hadn't read the piece too carefully; force-field work is so new and so experimental that I never expected to be dealing with it.

"The experiment is going quite well. Globe three, now."

I remembered one concept from that article: "*The essential nature of a force-field is such that the projector must be located within the system itself.*"

"Dave, it's horrible! They are killing them one by one . . . and soon it'll be our turn."

"Maybe they won't get to us," I said. "Maybe the experiment is such a success they won't need to test us all."

They were empty, foolish words, and I knew it. But they soothed her and they calmed me for the moment, which was all that mattered. My trained engineer's fingers explored the cage, fumbled over roughness, pried and sought . . .

"Globe four, now."

We were apparently in globes seven and eight. Unless they didn't intend to proceed right up the row.

"Globe five."

Four of the cages contained only skeletons, now. My blood chilled at the thought of a world exposed to this stuff all at once.

"Globe six."

Kate's cage was next . . . and mine after that. We had only minutes, seconds left.

And I found what I was looking for.

The woman in Cage Six—

AMAZING STORIES

she was poor Mrs. Cowan—was staring in horror at the cloud of blue gas filtering into her compartment when I went into action.

I leaped high, snared the little globe dangling above my head, and shuddered at the thought of what I held in my hand. Then I stamped down on the generator of the force-field.

It was a tiny knob embedded in the floor—but it had to be within its own field, according to force-field theory, and that was the flaw in the use of force-fields as cages. The aliens hadn't counted on that.

There was a blue flicker in the air and I knew I was free. Kate's cage and mine had shared a wall in common, and for an instant her cage was open before her generator filled in the gap. I reached in and yanked her through.

The aliens were busy observing Mrs. Cowan's last seconds of life, and for three or four seconds they didn't know what was happening. After that, it didn't matter.

"Come on!" I whispered, and dragged Kate after me, nearly pulling her arm out of its socket. We must have set an Olympic record spurting across the floor and into the open elevator that loomed up some thirty feet away.

The aliens saw us, then. One of them shouted and went for his gun. The elevator door began to close.

I was a pretty good pitcher in high school. I hurled that deadly little globe of blue gas to the ground about a foot in front of the nearest alien, and the elevator door closed.

The sound of screaming followed us all the way down.

There was no time for hysterics. We legged it grimly out the door of the lab—it opened easily enough from the inside—and down to the corner candy-store. We didn't look back. I knew that that devil-gas was spreading all through the lab now, filtering into the air system, turning those smug aliens into heaps of bones.

I stuck a dime into the phone-slot with fingers that didn't want to obey, and called police headquarters. I asked for Feuerman.

"We haven't found your wife yet, Mr. Martin, but—"

"Never mind that," I snapped. "I've found her. Listen carefully, Feuerman." I told him what had just taken place, as quickly as I could.

When I was through he said, "Stay right there, Mr. Martin. We'll be right over to see that you're taken care of."

"I'm *not* crazy, Feuerman."

He laughed, and I hung up. Kate produced another dime, and I called the local branch of the FBI. I told them who I was, giving my lab as reference, and went through my story again.

Maybe they thought I was crazy, but they didn't say so. "We'll investigate this right away," Mr. Martin. "Give us that address again, please."

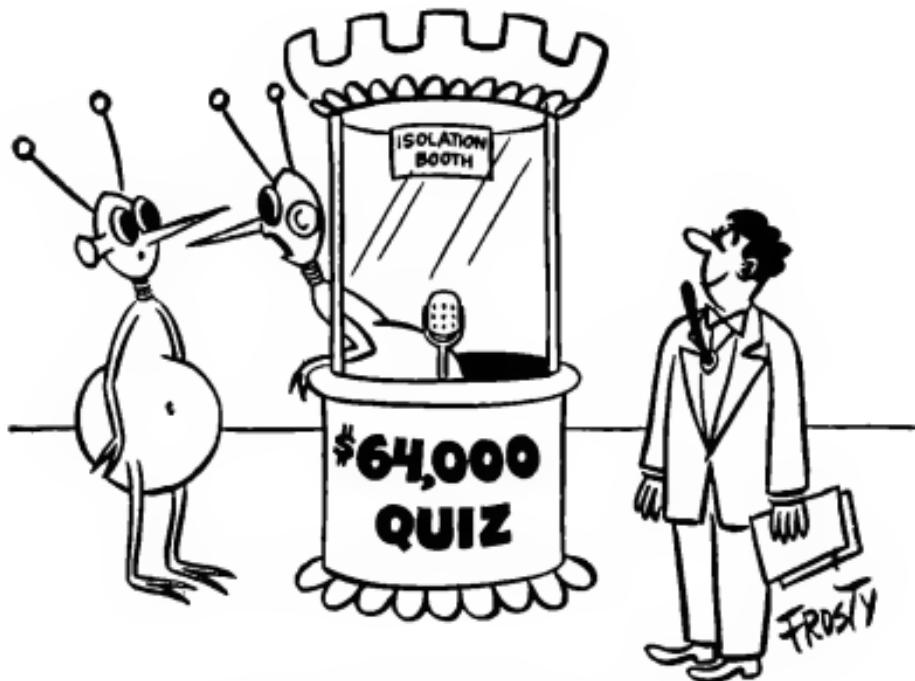
They investigated, all right. I don't know how they did it, because I wasn't there, but they got inside the lab, wear-

ing diving suits, and reported there wasn't a sign of life in there. Just skeletons. Strange ones.

Down at our labs these days, we're kept busy with a Government contract. We're designing equipment to be used in interplanetary spaceships.

We figure that Venus is going to want to colonize us again some day—and next time, we may not be so lucky. So we're planning to get there first, and colonize *them*.

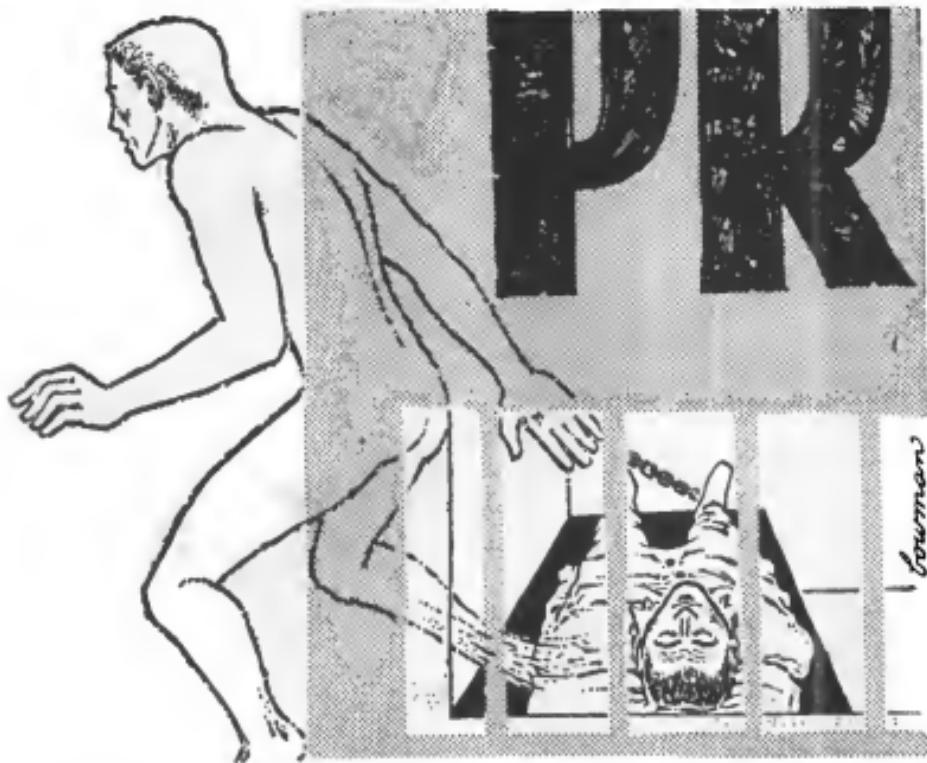
THE END



"I had a feeling the authorities would question us sooner or later."

THE ANONYMOUS MAN

By O. H. LESLIE



bouman

TAKE your hands off me," Gresham said, curling his lips at the detective. "You can arrest me, but you don't have to touch me."

The man across the table from him wasn't ruffled by the outburst.

"You admit to robbing the Warren house?"

"I've told you that already. I took the old woman's jewelry because it amused me."

"I stole for experience, to

see if my astral projection could accomplish the feat. I sought no profit from the enterprise; that would have violated the principle of *karma*."

The detective, a practical man named Boze, wasn't unfamiliar with this kind of lunatic conversation.

"How about it?" Boze said, "Will you give us your name?"

"No. My name means nothing. Names are identities, mundane designations."

"You're not making it easy on yourself."

"I don't care to try," Gresham said. "The most you can do is put me in jail, and no jail can hold me."

"I wouldn't be so sure. We make 'em kind of strong nowadays, with real iron bars."

"It doesn't matter. I shall penetrate them astrally."

"Come again?"

"I have studied the mysticism of the East since I was a child. I have learned the sacred and forgotten principles of *karma*, which enable me to leave my corporeal body at any time. You may put my solid flesh into any cell, Lieutenant. But you cannot prevent my astral self from escaping." He laughed shortly, and then frowned. "I'm getting tired of this. Can't we get it over with?"

The detective slapped his palms on the table and stood up. "I'm tired of it, too. Okay, Anonymous. We'll give you what you want. Hey, Bailey."

A stubby young man said: "Yeah, Lieutenant?"

"Interrogation's over. Put our friend in the cooler."

"Right." He made the mistake of touching Gresham's elbow, and got shaken off. "Pardon me," he grinned, "Mister—"

"Anonymous," Boze said

curtly. "Our friend's not giving his name. Maybe a few days on ice will thaw him out."

Gresham buttoned his jacket around his small waist, and preceded the young man into the corridor. He walked briskly, as if anxious to get where he was going.

The cell was five feet square, and he was the only occupant. The clean plaster walls were backed by thick concrete and steel. There was a low bunk in the corner of the room, and a hooded light bulb dangling from the ceiling. There was no window.

Gresham stretched out on the bunk as soon as he was alone. He shut his eyes and locked his fingers over the lids. The darkness helped him think, and he had much to think about.

He thought of Shaya, mostly, the Indian girl who had become his *amah* when his parents lived in the lonely colonial outpost near Mysore. Sometimes, the memory of Shaya was painful to Gresham, but tonight his weariness made him forget the hurt of his loss. He thought of her gentle voice and deep mysterious eyes, and longed for her arms as he had never longed for his mother's. It had been Shaya who had

taught Gresham the deeper subtleties of *karma*, taught him from her own wisdom and from the great cryptic books which had been Shaya's inheritance from her Yoga father. Shaya! Shaya! Gresham moaned. If you could but see me now!

His eyes flew open and his ears listened. There was silence in the corridors of the prison.

He got up slowly from the bunk and reached for the beaded chain that dangled from the shaded bulb.

In the darkness, he stretched out and stiffened his body until it seemed to grow by inches. When his limbs had attained stonelike rigidity, he folded his arms across his chest, and screwed his eyes shut until the white flashes came.

Then, with a brief prayer, he entered the trance state.

He was immobile for half an hour, before his naked astral self stepped out of his inert corporeal body.

Gresham looked down at himself, and laughed soundlessly. This opportunity always amused him; this seeing himself as others saw him. At first, he had been shocked by the strangeness of his own form. But now he was accustomed to himself, and he look-

ed down at his body as he would at a beloved friend.

"Good night," he whispered with a grin.

He stepped towards the concrete wall of the cell and punged through it into the street.

It was a moonless, balmy night, but his astral body, although solid to the touch of others, could feel no breath of the breeze. The lack of a tactile sense disturbed Gresham. He could see and he could hear, but he felt and tasted nothing. It was this, more than anything, that prevented him from remaining too long in the astral phase, that sent him scurrying back to his corporeal body after a few hours.

But tonight, nothing could disturb Gresham. Tonight, he felt an added sense of freedom as he stood on the street outside the prison.

He ducked his naked body back into the concealment of the stone wall as a man came walking by.

He waited until he was a step before him, and then leaped out.

The man screamed at his startling appearance, and the surprise enabled Gresham to do his work quickly. His arm snaked around the man's throat and squeezed until his

victim sighed and became limp. He was a taller man, and his clothes wouldn't be quite satisfactory, but Gresham couldn't be choosy. He stripped the man to his underwear, chuckling to himself at the idea of committing the crime in the very shadow of the police.

He dressed quickly, rolled the cuffs of the trousers, and walked off.

He walked for an hour about the city streets, relishing the mere fact of his astral existence, watching the unknowing faces of the people who passed him. A man asked him for a match, and he dug into the stranger's pockets to find one. He found something better: a wallet containing forty dollars.

The money gave him an idea. He found a bar called CARL's, and went inside.

The bar was deserted, except for one mournful patron dozing over a beer. Gresham was disappointed; he craved the warmth of human company, particularly the special warmth of women. The death of his *amah* had left a void no woman had yet filled, but still Gresham sought her substitute. He sought her in his corporeal body and in his astral self, but he was yet to find the woman to take Shaya's place.

He slid onto a stool and ordered a bourbon. The liquor slid tastelessly down his astral throat. There were disadvantages to this dual existence. Tomorrow, his other body would awake with a hangover.

He ordered another, and then a third.

He was downing his fourth when the woman came in.

It was her coal-black hair and jet eyes that jolted him. Shaya had hair like that, and eyes that held black wells of wisdom. But that was the only resemblance. Shaya was olive-skinned and plain. This woman was sallow-skinned, and handsome in a hard, city way.

She went into a booth, and the bartender brought her a whiskey. Gresham stopped him on his return, and asked:

"Who is that?"

"A customer."

"But what's her name?"

"Ask her yourself."

Without hesitation, Gresham got off the stool and walked to the booth, feeling chagrin at the ill-fitting suit that clothed his astral body. The woman was sipping her drink slowly, staring at nothing. He cleared his throat and said:

"Don't send me away. I want to talk to you."

She looked up with a smile. "Sure, honey. I'll talk to you."

Only I get thirsty when I talk."

He edged into the seat opposite and beckoned to the bartender. He ordered another round and said: "My name is Paul Gresham. What's yours?"

"Linda. Linda Lamour, honey."

"Please." Gresham's face was pained. "Don't call me honey."

"Sure, honey," she laughed. "Anything you say."

Gresham swallowed his drink hastily. "You reminded me of somebody when you walked in. A woman I once knew. She—she wasn't my sweetheart or anything. She was my nurse, when I was a child. Her name was Shaya; she was an Indian."

"Is that a crack?"

He licked his lips. "She was a wonderful woman, a really wonderful woman. I've never met anyone like her since she died—"

The woman yawned, and Gresham's voice grew desperate.

"Listen, I know this is crazy. But as soon as I saw you, I thought—I want to get to know you better—"

"Sure, honey. I'm not doing anything tonight."

His hand stole across the damp surface of the table and

touched hers. He felt nothing when their flesh met; it was maddening.

"Let's have a drink," the woman said. "Let's have a *coupla* drinks."

Gresham lifted his hand towards the bartender and signalled for a round.

At three o'clock, the woman was slumped across the table, her head across her arms.

The barman said: "Closing time, buddy. Better get your girl friend outa here."

"But she's passed out—"

"Not my business. You spent the evening with her, you get her home."

"I don't know where she lives."

The barman smirked. "That is easy. 31 Ortega, two blocks from here. Come on, I'll give you a hand."

With the bartender's aid, Gresham got the woman to the door. She stirred drunkenly, and put her arms around his shoulders. He struggled with her down the streets until they came to a dismal doorway with the faded numeral 31 on the facade. She came to life suddenly, and reeled up the stairway, with Gresham following. But once in the room, she collapsed across the creaking bed and began to snore.

Gresham went to his knees

beside her, and touched her dangling hand.

"Shaya," he whispered.
"Shaya . . ."

She groaned, and rolled over.

"Shaya, wait for me. I'll come back soon. I'll come back in my real body. Wait for me, Shaya."

He got to his feet and started for the door. It opened before the hand touched the knob.

The man was short, but the thickness of his chest and arms made him appear massive. He grunted in surprise when he saw Gresham, and then laughed.

"Hullo, pigeon."

"Who are you?"

"Nobody; a friend. Thanks for bringing Linda home—"

"It's all right. I—I was in a bar—"

"Sure, sure. Thanks a lot, buddy."

The man grinned, and stepped aside for Gresham to go through the doorway.

He didn't feel the blow that descended on his head; his corporeal body lying in the jail cell would suffer the pain later. But the blow reacted upon Gresham's astral body as well; he went tumbling down the stairs and lay unconscious on the landing.

It was afternoon when he awoke, in an alley three doors from the building, his stolen clothes filthy, the wallet gone.

He arose groggily, and staggered into the street.

He walked about for an hour, clearing his head of the fog implanted by the blow. Then he returned to the station house.

The street outside his cell was deserted. He shucked his clothing, and slipped his naked body fluidly into the wall, reappearing on the other side.

The cell was empty.

He ducked into the shadows when he heard the voices of the men in the corridor.

"I can't explain it," he heard Boze say. "Maybe he fell and hit his head on the floor. Maybe he butted himself to death. I just don't know."

"I'm not so sure," the other voice said. "From what I could tell, it didn't look like the blow was hard enough to kill him."

"But he was dead, wasn't he?" Boze said.

"Dead as mackerel."

Gresham froze against the prison wall, and realized with a clutch of growing horror that they were speaking of him.

"How about an autopsy?" Boze asked.

"They nixed the idea. Said

the blow on the head was sufficient. They buried him this morning, in the public cemetery."

Gresham's mind was racing. If they had performed no autopsy, then his body was still intact. If he could find it in time, find it before the cold of the grave closed in upon his flesh, before the worms set about their quiet meal . . .

He fought the panic within him, and passed through the wall back into the street. The clothing was still on the ground; he dressed again and rushed off towards the bus whose last stop was the city burial grounds on the edge of town.

The ride seemed interminable. When they reached the cemetery, he hurried to the main gate and spoke to the sleepy-eyed old man guarding the portal.

"I'm looking for a grave," he said breathlessly. "Someone buried here this morning—"

"Been a dozen burials today, mister. What's the name of the party?"

"Gresham," he said, and then remembered his refusal to give his name. "Never mind

that! The grave is unmarked—"

The old man shook his head. "You'll have a hard time findin' an unmarked grave here, friend. There's thousands of 'em."

"I've got to find it! I've got to!"

He pushed his way past the old man and began running towards the interminable rows of stone markers that dotted the grass. He ran and ran, his eyes searching the tombstones wildly, looking for some sign of fresh-turned grounds, seeking some clue to the grave that held his own mortal flesh.

"You won't find it!" the old man shouted behind him. "Not that way you won't—"

"I've got to!" Gresham muttered. "I've got to, got to, got to . . ."

Yet the more he searched, the more anonymous the graves became, until their anonymity seemed to blend into one overwhelming mass of gray stone that whirled and spun before his eyes, until he fell sobbing to the damp earth, beating his astral fists against the unrelenting ground.

THE END

GIFT FROM TOMORROW

By RANDALL GARRETT

Of course the best folks to deal with these extra-terrestrial snoopers would be the Army, the Navy, the Coast Guard, and the Marines. If none of these are available, though, a couple of old sour-doughs like Little Blue and Jedd will do very nicely.

JEDD RANGER automatically reined in his horse when he saw the speck in the sky.

"Ho! Ho, boy!" The animal halted obediently while Jedd narrowed his eyes to keep the sun and the dust from obscuring his vision.

Beside him, Little Blue stopped his own mount. "What is it, Jedd?" Then he saw where Jedd was looking and turned his own eyes toward it. "Bird, you reckon?"

"Jest look. Don't talk." Jedd's voice was hard.

Little Blue shut up and looked.

The dot in the sky grew, expanding itself as it approached, becoming a rounded, boat-like object. It had no wings, such as a bird would have. If either Jedd or Little Blue had

ever seen one, they might have said it looked like an automobile without wheels—streamlined, wide, and low. But mid-twentieth century automobile would have looked as alien to their eyes as the flying object did.

"What is it?" Little Blue repeated after a moment.

"Shut up," Jedd said without rancor. Then he added: "I don't reckon I rightly know."

They could hear a soft swishing noise as it passed overhead, high above them in the pale blue of the cloudless sky.

"You know," said Jedd, "I bleeve that might be a eriplane."

"That's old lady's talk," scoffed Little Blue. "Ain't nothing could fly in the air and carry a man."



The character wore a fish bowl on his
head and looked dangerous.

"You are plain stupid, Little Blue," Jedd said. "If anything could carry a man in the air, that thing could. And it ain't an animal."

Little Blue said nothing in reply to the bigger man's cold logic.

"I wonder if it's carrying a man now?" Jedd said, his voice hard in the dry air. "I've heard tell of other folk seeing them things, but I never took no stock in 'em 'til now."

"Mmmm," said Little Blue. "They supposed to come from over the Sarahnivadas, but that's foolishness. Can't nobody live in Kaornya."

Jedd nodded silently. They both believed that implicitly, though neither of them had ever been across the mountain range of the far west into the territory which had once been the State of California. But everyone who had seen the area from a distance said that it glowed at night with a strange blue radiance and that nothing lived there. Not a plant, not an animal, not even an insect. Nothing lived there—except, perhaps, demons.

"I'd sure like to have one of them," Jedd said softly. "I reckon I'd show Hunter Jawn a thing or two."

"I'd like to kill him," Little Blue said savagely, his eyes still on the moving object in

the sky. "Hunter Jawn hadn't ought to—"

"Hey!" Jedd interrupted. "Look!"

They watched without saying anything. No words were needed. The thing, whatever it was, was losing altitude, dropping down and down toward the drifting dust below. It disappeared beyond the dust-dunes several miles away. When it did not rise again, Jedd looked significantly at Little Blue.

"You—you ain't agoing after it are you?" Little Blue asked.

"You sure right, I am. You ain't afraid, maybe?"

"N-no," said Little Blue, enthusiastically.

Without another word, Jedd twisted his horse around and trotted toward the spot where they had last seen the flying thing. Reluctantly, Little Blue followed.

Peter Hayakawa cursed fluently as he fought to keep the flier on an even keel. The anti-grav units in the undercarriage were keeping it from falling like a rock, but the buoyancy vanes were acting up. He could see what had happened; one of the leads had come loose, which had automatically switched on the antigravs.

But he didn't dare go too far on the antigravs; the power they used was too wasteful. There was nothing to do but bring the flier down in this God-forsaken Texas dust-bowl and try to repair it with the emergency kit.

It had been a long haul from Hawaii, across the calm blue of the Pacific and the deadly blue of the Coast region, but this dust bowl looked even more forbidding than the radioactivity.

He tried to pick a level spot, but these dunes didn't look too level anywhere; besides it was difficult to fight the jerks and the rolling lurches caused by the errant buoyancy vanes, and he couldn't see the ground below too clearly.

As the little flier lost velocity and altitude, he saw what looked like a fairly level spot—it looked smooth enough for emergency purposes, anyway.

Finally, the Hawaiian managed to bring the vehicle to a dead halt directly over the flat spot. He looked down. Ten, maybe twelve feet. Okay. Lower away. Slowly, the craft settled to the surface of the dust.

He took a deep breath of pure relief, then flipped the switch on his radiophone. "Peter Hayakawa, PH3272 to Lulu," he said.

"Honolulu Base to Hayakawa 3272. What's up?"

"Power leads to my right buoyancy vane fouled up. I haven't looked at the damage yet, but it'll probably take fifteen or twenty minutes to fix—maybe more."

"Check. Where are you?"

The Hawaiian gave his positional grid numbers, reading them off the panel before him.

"Texas, huh?" said the operator in Honolulu. "Okay; let us know when you're airborne again. And keep an eye out for roving nomads; they travel in pretty big bands in that section."

"I didn't see any big bands of anything," Peter said. "This desert looks deader than Hell—and I mean that literally."

"I've seen it," said Honolulu. "Well, give us a buzz."

"Check." Peter flipped off the phone.

He looked around him at the flowing dust, grimaced, opened the door and got out. A hundred years ago, this had been farmland, according to those who were supposed to know. But the climactic changes after the Big Blast had changed that, although some said the process had started long before the seetee meteor swarm had struck.

Mankind had worried for a long time before that about various kinds of self-inflicted atomic doom, but it had taken the Seetee Swarm to show that Man still had not equalled the sheer, utter hell of Nature. From the north they had come, lumps of invert, contraterrene matter, looping in from high above the ecliptic, crossing Earth's orbit in their elongated path around the sun.

Now men knew what had caused the great pits on the surface of the Moon, for they had watched those hunks of invert matter slam into the satellite, gouging new craters in flaring displays of incandescence. For when seetee matter strikes ordinary matter, the two cancel out, both of them becoming hard gamma radiation and neutrons in a blast of violence that is almost inconceivable. A bit of seetee the size of a golfball makes an atomic bomb look puny.

The orbital period of the Swarm was estimated at close to a million years. Of course, the Swarm didn't intersect Earth's orbit at the exact time Earth was there, every time it came around, but in the thousand million or so years that it had been looping in its pro-

digiously long ellipse, it had had several chances to do its work.

Most of the bigger ones were gone, fortunately. The big boys, like the ones that had blasted out Tycho crater and Copernicus had long since disappeared. But there were enough small ones left to inflict plenty of damage.

When the first one struck Upper Mongolia, the Great Asian People's Republic had gotten panicky and dusted California — and succeeded better than they thought. The rocket bomb sent over the pole had been caught up with by a seetee meteor batting along at something like twenty-six miles a second and literally searing its way through the sky. It had slammed itself right up the tailpipe of the descending rocket, and the resulting explosion had sent a cloud of radiodust all down the coast.

The lighter stuff, borne by the jetstream, dusted off the rest of the United States—once over lightly.

The other bombs never reached their destinations. American retaliation was swift and final. The whole thing had damned near been final for everybody.

Australia, South America, and Southern Africa had sur-

vived pretty well, along with Hawaii and a few Pacific Islands. The Philippines had been whiffed off by radiation from Asia.

After a hundred years, Mankind was just beginning to get its collective breath back.

And, thought Peter Hayakawa, men are tougher than they thought.

Now that the residual radioactivity had died down here, east of the Sierra Nevadas, the half-starved remnants of the American tribes were returning.

He looked around again, but he could see nothing but dust. Shrugging, he lifted the cover off the right buoyancy vane and began inspecting the circuits.

Jedd and Little Blue lay on their stomachs behind a dust dune and watched the queerly-dressed man as he worked at the queer machine.

"I tell you, he's jest a man," Jedd whispered. "Jest a plain, ordinary man."

"Maybe." Little Blue's voice sounded dubious.

"I've heard queer things," Jedd went on, "about men from over yonder who can do things like that. And the old stories my grandpap used to tell, about when he was a little

boy, before the Big Blast, everybody had things like that."

"Then how come we ain't still got 'em?" Little Blue demanded.

"Shut up," said Jedd, unable to formulate a proper argument.

"I'm gonna git me that *eriplane*," Jedd said suddenly after a few more minutes.

Little Blue goggled up at him. "You crazy? How you gonna fly a thing like that? You don't know no magic!"

"I get that fella to teach me. He knows how."

"Jedd! What if he puts a hex on you or something?"

"Look," Jedd said patiently, "if'n he did, we wouldn't be no worse off than we are now. Hunter Jawn run us out of the tribe. Ain't no other tribe gonna take us. They'd kill us on sight—mebbe eat us, like some tribes do. That fella out there can't do no worse than that, now, can he?"

"Reckon not," said Little Blue after a minute. But he still didn't sound too convinced.

"All right, then. We got no one to take care of our bones if we die. But if we go back and kill Hunter Jawn with that *eriplane*, then I'll be boss of the tribe."

Little Blue nodded. The

thought of having his bones lie untended in the desert, or eaten by one of the cannibal tribes, instead of being properly burned, so that he could get to Skyland, didn't appeal to him at all. A man whose bones weren't burned just died—there was no afterlife for him.

"All right, then; I got a plan figured out." Jedd outlined the plot to Little Blue.

Peter Hayakawa was bent over the buoyancy vane when he heard the voice.

"Halloo-oo-oo!"

He jerked upright and looked over the flier in the direction from which the voice had come. There, some twenty yards away, on a nearby dune, stood an apparition.

The nomad was clad in the tanned skin of some animal and wore a broad-brimmed, floppy hat on his head to shade his eyes from the blistering Texas sun. He was fully bearded, and his hair was long and caught up in a pony-tail with a bit of rawhide thong. A hefty-looking longbow was slung over one shoulder, and at his waist was a sheath that carried a foot-long knife.

But his hands were raised high to show that he carried no weapons ready to use. Nonetheless, Peter dropped

his hand casually to the blaster at his hip.

"What do you want?" he called.

The barbarian blinked for a moment, then said something that the Hawaiian didn't understand at first. Then his mind focused on the words themselves. They were English.

The accent was atrocious, but the man had said: "I'm lost. Have you got any water?"

Water? Peter frowned. He had a little. If the barbarian—

Then, quite suddenly, Peter understood. No barbarian would approach an unknown thing and ask for water!

He started to whirl around, but he was too late. A sharp point was pressed against his side, and a harsh voice said: "Don't move less'n you want a stab!"

Peter froze. Like a stupid fool, he'd been trapped!

A hand pulled the blaster out of his holster.

"Careful of that!" Peter warned. "It's dangerous." He didn't mind the barbarian blowing his own head off, but he didn't want an accidental discharge ruining the flier—or Peter Hayakawa.

"All right, Little Blue," said the man behind him, "come on down and help me tie him. He ain't dangerous."

"What do you want with me?" Hayakawa asked as Little Blue bound his wrists with rawhide thongs.

"You're gonna teach me how to fly in the air," Jedd said decisively.

"If I don't?"

"If you don't, reckon I'll kill you."

"You'll kill me anyway," Peter pointed out.

There was a moment of silence, then Jedd said: "Tell you what; you teach me how, we'll do the killing quick and easy. If not, we'll make it rough on you—real rough."

"And we won't burn your bones if you don't teach us," Little Blue chimed in.

Burn my bones? Peter thought. *That sounds interesting.* He knew that the only way he'd get out of this fix was to outwit the two nomads. It wasn't a matter of superior intelligence, it was simply that a civilized mind can understand that of the barbarian, while the reverse is not and cannot be true.

"On the other hand," Jedd said, "if you teach me good, I give you my oath we'll burn your bones proper—all the rites and everything."

Peter nodded. It never occurred to a barbarian that there were other religions than his own.

"Now, I'll make a deal with you," Peter said. "I'll teach you how to fly the flier and I'll give it to you if you'll just turn me loose in the desert and let me take my chances getting out alive."

"All right," said Jedd. "That's what we'll do."

The agreement sounded a little too quick to suit the Hawaiian. "Your oath," he demanded.

"My oath on my father's bones," Jedd said.

"Oh, no," Peter said, shaking his head; "on your own bones."

There was a long, long pause. Then Jedd's harsh voice said: "Will you swear on your own bones that you'll teach me true and proper how to fly it?"

"I will. I'll teach you how to fly it as well as I do."

"All right," Jedd said, after a time. And the mutual oaths were made.

The one thing that no civilized man wanted to think of was deadly weapons in the hands of barbarians, but—

"What about this?" Jedd asked. "You said it was dangerous." He was holding the blaster.

Peter shrugged. He hated to lose the blaster, too, but—

He told the barbarian hew

to hold and point and fire it. When the blaster seared a glowing hole in the dust, Jedd smiled. "Now we'll *really* get Hunter Jawn!"

Peter said nothing as the big man took off his holster and put it on his own belt.

"Now," said Jedd, "teach me to fly."

"You'll have to untie me," Peter said.

Jedd took out the blaster again and pointed it. "All right. But don't try anything."

"I won't," Peter assured him wholeheartedly.

Jedd cut the thongs and the Hawaiian climbed into the flier. "Get in," he said. "You are ready for your first lesson."

When they were inside, he reached out and flipped a switch. "By the way," he said conversationally, "my name is Peter Hayakawa. What's yours?"

They told him.

"Okay. Since you're forcing me to teach you to fly, I'm going to do it. Now watch—"

He kept up a steady stream of talk as he demonstrated how the controls worked.

The flier was really quite simple to handle. With one of the buoyancy vanes still inoperative, it wasn't capable of high speed, but the antigrav

handled it well at lower velocities. He wished he could have gone up high and given them the full effect of a power dive, but he didn't have control enough for that kind of stunt.

Slowly, Jedd began to understand the operation of the machine. When Peter let him take over the foolproof controls, he was awkward at first, but within a few hours he was doing quite well.

"All right," he said at last, "I got it. I can handle it. I reckon I'm a real magician now."

"You sure are, Jedd," said Little Blue admiringly. "Now you reckon I could try it?"

"Not jest yet," Jedd told him. "We got to let our passenger off first."

Peter kept his mouth shut and tried to look calm. This was it; he'd held his part of the bargain—if only Jedd's oath meant as much to him as Peter thought it did.

Cautiously, Jedd lowered the little flier down to the dust that swirled beneath them. Jedd neutralized the controls and opened the door. The blaster was in his hand. "Get out," he said in a flat voice.

Peter climbed out, half expecting to feel the sudden biting burn of a blaster beam in his back, although he knew that he would never feel the

death when it came—if it came.

"You, too, Little Blue," said Jedd.

"Me? But—, Jedd!"

Peter turned just as Jedd shoved Little Blue out of the flier and pulled the trigger of the blaster. The beam lashed out, its tremendous heat turning the water in Little Blue's tissues into steam, blasting away half his chest.

"Had to do it," Jedd said simply. "He'd of been in the way. Besides, nobody but me ought to be able to fly in these parts." He looked thoughtfully at the corpse. "I'd sure like to burn his bones; I liked Little Blue."

"The gun will do that," Peter said evenly. "See how it burned his chest?"

Jedd nodded. He aimed the weapon and pulled the trigger, firing blast after blast until there was nothing left of Little Blue on the seared dust.

"That's that," said Jedd. "You can git now. I don't reckon you'll get far without water or food in this desert."

And with that, Jedd lifted the vehicle and vanished into the sky.

He had kept his word.

It was nearly twenty-four hours before the relief flier from Hawaii found Peter Ha-

yakawa sitting on a sand dune. He was hungry and thirsty, but otherwise all right.

The flier settled down beside him, and he sipped at the water flask the pilot handed him.

"We found your barbarian, Pete," the pilot said. "Or what was left of him. That was pretty quick thinking, turning on the radiophone first thing."

"Fine thing," Peter said, grinning. "You found my flier before you found me. Did one of the other boys pick it up?"

"Yeah. We heard everything that was going on. I thought for a while that Jedd was going to kill you. We came as fast as we could."

"I know. I'm okay."

"Jedd isn't," said the pilot. "He must have fallen from close to five thousand feet. He lived up to his part of the deal, but you didn't."

"Oh, yes, I did," Peter said. "I taught him how to fly that boat, and that's all he asked me to do."

The pilot grinned. "Yeah, but you didn't tell him that running it on the antigrav would run it out of fuel fast. You didn't even tell him it would run out of fuel at all."

"You know why?"

"No."

"He didn't ask me." **THE END**



...OR SO YOU SAY

BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

As an avid reader of s-f I have noticed a regrettable trend of late to stress more fiction and less science. If I wish to read of homosap. superior (male hero variety) and damsels in distress I'd buy a romance type magazine, but not s-f. It is my earnest hope that you will, in the future, put more science into the science fiction. No mad scientists, no dashing heroes, no breathtaking females, no monstrous aliens, just plain old possibilities like "Captive Audience" by Ann Warren Griffith, or "The Big Trip Up Yonder" by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. These are science fiction in true proportion—present day science predicting possible tomorrows. In other words—why not possibilities instead of absurdities?

Ernie Husemann
136 Arbor Dr.
Southport, Conn.

• Just plain old possibilities. Wouldn't that be a little dull, Mr. Husemann? Plain old possibilities are what you and I and millions of others wrestle with all day long. The word science in science fiction is certainly no license for unimaginative fiction. The stories you mention as example may, under closer scrutiny, be not at all in "plain old" category. Perhaps they were just stories you liked better than others you've read. Science fiction is a big field and there are a lot of definitions for it.

Dear Editor:

"The Man Who Collected Women," was the cream of the April crop. "Cosmic Kill," was something new and different. However, do not take me too lightly. It wasn't perfect. The whole magazine at first sight reminded me of a telephone index and I had to pick it up off the stand twice and then feel it to make sure.

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

• Now you've got us wondering. Amazing has been slammed and complimented by and with a lot of comparisons in its time, but a telephone index—really now. By the way—was that a brickbat or a bouquet?

Dear Ed:

As usual, *Amazing* had a stellar issue. The first installment of "Cosmic Kill," by Robert Arnette has me waiting breathlessly for the conclusion. "School for Conquerors" and "The Man Who Collected Women" were both superior. In fact, the only real flop was "The Rope That Waited" which I just couldn't see at all. All of your departments are excellent, but I've come to expect that of *Amazing*. I looked up the article in *Popular Electronics* which you referred to in your editorial. I must admit that it is a chilling prospect, but I have no doubts that man will learn how to control it sensibly.

David Rolfe
E. 3136 11th Ave.
Spokane, Wash.

• Only one comment I'm sure you agree with—man better!

Dear Editor:

I still read *Amazing* although the stories are not as good or as well written as those in the forties. Instead of too much space opera how about some cave-men stories, lost civilizations, some good time travel yarns. I want to see you reprint some of the better old novels and soon. I want to refute what you said in the current *Amazing*. The present stories are not great and I don't want to wait twenty years to read the cur-

rent junk. I want the old stories now and your new magazine would be the place for them.

Ned Reese
Rt. 3, Box 68-A
Kannapolis, N.C.

• *In response to many requests such as yours, Ned, we published an anthology of old Amazing classics in 1956. The Anniversary Issue. Hope you didn't miss it.*

Dear Editor:

As a newsdealer and a science-fiction fan, I find that all my customers overlook and definitely avoid buying any and all science-fiction books (including *Amazing Stories*) with serials in them. Why do you go against the majority?

Stanley Nash
17 Battery Place
New York, N.Y.

• *We don't, Mr. Nash. Result—no more serials.*

Dear Editor:

Having just finished the April issue of *Amazing Stories*, I must congratulate you on a fine, rounded issue of action-adventure stories. Though I often prefer the more cerebral type of s-f, there is always too much lean meat in my reading diet, and the rich, red stuff of which *Amazing's* stories are made suits me just fine. It always intrigues me to see just what weird twists your writers will get on the standard sin-and-redemption theme. Your books are always a great deal of fun to read.

However, I have a rather serious gripe. Whether it is proper to bring it to light in the pages of *Amazing* or not, I don't quite know; but since the April issue forced this problem on me—as indicative of what seems to abound in the s-f circles—I'm afraid I must. As a writer of fiction which sells to an entirely different sort of magazine than that typified by *Amazing Stories*, and as a writer who has attempted s-f only three or four times (though I have been most happy to have sold all of them), I speak with trepidation.

But it would seem to me that the noisome fans who try to

mark your editorial policies, the ones who write into your (and other magazine's) letter columns, are the very ones who are stifling the writers of s-f. They call for this and they call for that . . . damning, complaining, or childishly praising that which deserves little praise. But what they are actually doing is setting themselves up as little Brooks Atkinsons; little tin Buddhas whose whims they expect to be obeyed. These fans are ridiculous in the extreme, it would seem to me, and if you allow yourself to be harried and chivvied by them, you are no better than they.

Have any of these Podunk writers any concrete idea of what it takes to edit and produce a magazine that will sell? Do they think these things spring fullblown from newsstands like Minerva from Zeus's forehead? I first chuckle, then weep, as I read the declamations of fans and the damnations of fandom. For they ask the impossible, and then when the editors and authors seriously try to give them what they want—as near as is humanly possible!—they blow up and scream the field is being ruined.

As a serious writer, I would be most fearful to try my hand at their game. The deck is stacked against the writer; he can't produce anything valid or worthwhile in the realm of s-f, as long as the big-mouthed cracked-pated fans are there to slap him down and ask the impossible. They get some idea that one story is great, and demand all other writers either try to imitate, or reach that level. Whether that level be higher or lower, doesn't matter. Fandom is a noose around the neck of science fiction. Either you loosen it, shuck it off, or you'll surely have given yourself enough rope by which to hang yourself. For what it's worth, that's my opinion.

Lyle Tryon
Staten Island, N. Y.

• *We think Stephen Decatur said it—correct us if we're wrong: I don't agree with what you say, but I'll defend to the death, your right to say it.*

Dear Editor:

Regarding the editorial in which you suggest that we read the article in *Popular Electronics* about hypnosis: from what I have read before and now, the above is almost a proven

science. You may recall several science-fiction movies which employed a device embedded in the victim's neck causing he or she to be at the command of the space invaders. While these pictures were on I wondered— Could it actually be done? The *Popular Electronics* article was well written for the layman.

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

- *That's PE's specialty—handling technical subjects clearly and understandably. They describe today, the inventions and scientific progressions Amazing predicted yesterday.*

Dear Editor:

Just finished perusing the April *Amazing*. I've been a fan for some good time, notwithstanding the amused glances, the "but you don't read those?" (Yes, I do!) and my friends think I'm crazy, (But I'm not.)

However, those serials!! They are driving me mad. Here sit I, engrossed in "Cosmic Kill" only to find it is continued. And so I teeter on the brink of uncertainty for a month and it is rather uncomfortable.

But I can't help it—I'll keep right on reading s-f, continued stories and all, as long as you publish it.

Betty D. Meyer
Holgate, Ohio

- *You've got it wrong, Betty. Those glances aren't motivated by amusement. Your friends are just plain envious. Try leaving your copy of Amazing around where they can get their hands on it and see what happens.*

Dear Editor:

In your latest issue you made a statement I can't let go unanswered. You stated the old classics are considered as such mainly because of their age. I wondered if you might be right so I dug out some of those old *Amazing's* and *Fantastic's* to check. I can now state that you are completely wrong. Those stories are better than almost anything seen in print today. In the past year only one of your stories, "The Scarlet Saint" can compare favorably to them. Read some of these stories

again and see for yourself. "So Shall Ye Reap," "Gods of Mars," "The Green Man," "Agharti," "This Way to Heaven," "Empire of Jegga" are but a few highlights of that era. Granted that a lot of the stories were none too good in those days, but do you honestly believe that more than a couple of your recent ones can compare with these? Taking nothing away from your current writers, you must realize that if any of them are capable of this kind of story, you aren't getting them.

Clayton Hamlin
24 Nochols St.
Pittsfield, Maine

• You may have a point, Mr. Hamlin, or perhaps not. We still say that nostalgia is an important element but we could be wrong too. You mention "So Shall Ye Reap." That story was written by Rog Phillips who kept right on knocking them out and is still prolific. His stories are still appearing in Amazing.



"Happy Birthday to You—Happy Birthday to You. . . ."



by VILLIERS GERSON

THE NAKED SUN. By Isaac Asimov. 187 pp. Doubleday. \$2.95.

It is an ironic but understandably common failing that we often treat our enemies with more respect than we do our friends. Take the planet Solaria, for instance: it was an enemy of Earth, yet when a series of crimes began to disturb the Solarians, it was to Earth that they turned. And Earth, in turn, demonstrated its respect by assigning one of Terra's most brilliant detectives, Elijah Baley (whom you will remember from that *tour de force* CAVES OF STEEL) as well as his super-robot partner, R. Daneel Olivaw.

Not only did Lije Baley have to unravel the intricacies of a deadly puzzle; he also had to fight himself. For on Solaria, Lije forced himself to stand the light of the sun, to breathe open air, and even to walk upon grass. To one raised by the standards of the subterranean, agoraphobic Terrans this conduct was sheer insanity, but, driven by forces he did not quite understand, Lije compelled himself to disregard every tenet of his upbringing—and by doing so, began to understand the crimes and the criminal that had brought him to a star-planet light-years from Earth. Of course, like the RCMP, Lije gets his man.

Once again we have top-notch Asimov in THE NAKED SUN. It's good to share Lije Baley's troubles and uncertainties with him again, for, like Horatio Hornblower, Lije is all too conscious of his own failings—a quality which gives to what could so easily have been merely another super-hero, a humanity rare in s-f.

THE SECRET PEOPLE. By Raymond F. Jones. 224 pp. Avalon Books. \$2.50.

Earth has gone through its Armageddon of the final Atomic War, and now its people are paying the price: few can have children, and of those who can, most give birth to ugly mutations. As a result, Terran authorities have instituted a licensing system which allows a man or a woman to become a parent only after he or she has been examined and found free of genetic defect.

The head of this authority is Robert Wellton, chief of the Genetics Bureau. And it is a japey of fate that Wellton is more guilty than any other culprit to face his Bureau, for Wellton not only is the father of a mutated human being, he is the father of hundreds. Like him, each is telepathic. Born through artificial insemination of normal mothers, they have been spirited away at birth, and placed in a hidden colony—**THE SECRET PEOPLE**—to grow up and to wait for the destiny toward which the father, Robert Wellton, will lead them.

Wellton has a bitter enemy, Dr. Rossi, who is determined to hunt down the secret people. It is Rossi who forces Wellton to resign, to come at long last to the colony, and there to find revolt. What then ensues would make for an exciting s-f novel except for one basic defect: neither Wellton nor any other character in the novel comes alive. As a result, I found myself removed from their problems and their troubles.

The writer, an old hand at science fiction, is technically proficient, acute, and ingenious. His characters have proper motivations, he develops his story with skill, but his people remain no more than paper figures, with ink flowing through their cardboard hearts.

THE VALLEY OF THE GODS. By Andy Anderson. Andoll Publishing Co., Baraboo, Wis. Paper: \$2.00.

We'd like to call the attention of that small group of s-f fans who are always bemoaning the lack of "the sense of wonder" in the field today, for whom science fiction died of modernity in the '30s, to this work, still another post-atomic-war tale.

Mr. Anderson's position in science fiction may be likened to that of Rousseau and Grandma Moses in painting: he is a

primitive creator whose ideas often outstrip his execution. Like another Rousseau, he dreams of the life idyllic—and writes of two protagonists: Sue, a lovely young girl, and her wise father. Both are members of a telepathic race which has replaced homo sapiens. As they wander through the ruins of the Forbidden City—destroyed by the Atomic War which removed most of humanity—Sue's father tells her about the race of Man.

As you can see, this is a perfect, if well-worn, springboard into philosophy, finger-shakings, and religion. Not that Mr. Anderson's ideas are without merit: he makes, as so many primitives do, a great deal of sense. But here is the theosophical science fiction which was all the rage in the '20s, but which, alas, is out of place today.

THE PAWNS OF NULL-A. By A. E. Van Vogt. 254 pp. Ace Reprint. Paper: 35¢.

For my money, Van Vogt knows very little about writing. Break down his sentence structure, and he's laughable. Examine his story's coherence, and you're apt to tear your hair. But that's not the important thing. What is, is that in spite of his imperfections, which are many, his absorption with megalomaniac heroes, his tendency to mount his rocket and shoot off in all directions—with all these, V² is still a very fine storyteller.

I'm sure you know the story by now, but if you don't, this is a continuation of the adventures of Gilbert Gosseyn, the man born with an extra brain, and the role he plays in a gigantic war between a cosmic Conqueror and the Null-A-trained people of Venus. This time Gosseyn finds his consciousness plucked from his body and placed into the weak and frightened body of Ashargin, princeling of the Galactic Empire. How is he to get back into his own body, how to defeat the Follower, that shadowy figure that is—what?—and how to stop the machinations of the bloody Enro the Red? More, what is the identity of the gigantic Player who moves them all like pawns in his galactic chess game?

Naturally, Gosseyn learns the answers to these and other questions, but not before you've raced through 254 pages of slam-bang, if somewhat addlepated, adventure.

THE DOOR INTO SUMMER. By Robert A. Heinlein. 188 pp.
Doubleday. \$2.95.

What pleasure to read a book written by a craftsman! Moreover, one as deft, as compassionate, as human, and as skilled as Robert Heinlein! His personal and professional qualities translate themselves into science-fiction stories which rank among those at the very top of the lists.

Daniel Boone Davis, inventor extraordinary, engineer, and aileurophile has built up, by 1970 a respected business and a sizeable income by manufacturing household robots to answer every housewife's prayer. He is in love with Belle Darkin, a sweet wench who betrays Dan with his own partner, bilks him of his income, robs him of his factory, and sends him, in reaction, into an alcoholic binge which leads to a 30-year deep-freeze journey to the year 2000 A.D. When Dan awakens out of the cold sleep which has cost him his place in the world, his fortune, his cat, Pete, and his hopes, he has only two things left to cling to: the memory of the child daughter of an old friend who has loved him, and his indomitable courage. Both drive him, with that delightful Heinlein-esque inevitability, to an adventure in time-travel which has enough twists to delight even an Asimov fan. From that point on, "Door Into Summer" becomes even more satisfying and absorbing, culminating in an ending of charm and warmth.

Note to feminine readers: And it's got a fine, but not over-obtrusive, love story, too.

EXPLORING MARS. By Roy A. Gallant. Illustrated by Lowell Hess. 62 pp. *Garden City Books.* \$2.00.

Roy Gallant, formerly a staff member of "Science Illustrated," has learned how to popularize scientific facts so that they become interesting, clear, and concise. Anyone who has read to any extent the known data on Mars will find this elementary, but Gallant's very simplicity makes this an excellent gift for the youngster who is just beginning to get interested in the heavens.

Lowell Hess proves himself equally able in drawing maps of Mars, charts of the Solar System, and imaginative pictures of what the surface of the Red Planet may very well be like.

Note to Junior: Leave that 21" screen for a second, and take a look at this....



THE SPACE CLUB

"Who said I was a shut-in? I guess I am in some sense of the word, but since Amazing and The Space Club came into my life, I'm traveling high, wide, and handsome! All over the U. S., Alaska, Hawaii, and Turkey. And the other day I had a wonderful letter from an old friend of mine who is now in the Space Corps." Thus writes Marijane Johnson, of 1011 E. Hoffman St., Spokane, Washington. It proves the Space Club is the place where old friends—and new ones—meet. We're tempted to write Marijane and ask what the Space Corps is. Got a hunch it's her way of indicating a Space Club member.

MAFIZ-AHMED, P. O. DAUDPUR, D. T. DINAJPUR, E. PAKISTAN.

. . . Mafiz hopes that the appearance of his name in The Space Club will bring him some foreign friends and pen pals. He is a writer, contributing articles in the "Bengali Magazine" of his country. He has black hair, is 5' 4" tall and weighs 114 pounds.

JIM ALLRED, 1227 LEE AVENUE, FORT WORTH, TEXAS. . . . Jim is 25 years old and works as a welder. He is married and has two small children. Both he and his wife are interested in science-fiction. Reading s-f stories and corresponding with fellow enthusiasts are all the hobby that Jim has time for.

STEVE BRODIE, 231 APT. B., LOWER BRICK ROW, FORT RILEY, KANSAS. . . . Steve is a 10th grader who likes science fiction a great deal. His other interests are biology and astronomy.

CALU, CAIXA POSTAL, 3676, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRASIL. . . . Calu seeks friends on this Planet who believe in the existence of life on other Planets. He hopes to get mail from people throughout the world.

JAMES GARY CHAMBERS, STAR ROUTE LUND ROAD, R. F. D. BOX 16, COSMOPOLIS, WASH. . . . 13-year-old James is in the 8th grade. He joined the Science-Fiction Book Club in late 1956 and has begun to build a science-fiction library. Other interests include stamps, astronomy, electronics and nuclear energy.

A/3c HUGH C. GRIFFIN, AF 1355-9384, HQ. SQ. SEC., 2721 SUP. GP., APO 74, BOX 138, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF. . . . 21 years old, Hugh is 5' 9" tall, has brown hair and green eyes. He likes to fish and hunt. Not only does he read science fiction, but he also likes to try and write it. At present he is stationed at Clark AFB in the Philippines.

VIRGINIA HUNTSBERGER, C/O UNGER & MAHON BOAT YARD, P. O. BOX 4011, BALTIMORE 22, MD. . . . Virginia lives aboard a 30-foot sailing sloop with her husband and 3-year-old son. They are leaving in midsummer for a cruise down the inland waterway to Florida, the Caribbean and Mexico. Eventually they plan a trip around the world on a work-a-year, cruise-a-year basis. This interest in adventure extends into the realm of science fiction. Reading s-f is one of her favorite pastimes. She certainly should have a lot of interesting things to correspond about with her Space Club pen pals.

SETH A. JOHNSON, 339 STILES ST., VAUX HALL, N. J. . . . Seth informs us that he is sending postcards to the more mature members of The Space Club. So far he has acquired about ten correspondents. He is aiming for correspondence on a worldwide basis.

JAMES H. LYLES, 1 EAST END AVE., NEW YORK 21, N. Y. . . . James has long been a fan and now, through The Space Club, is able to write to other fans. He is 34 years old, enjoys music, sports and most of all s-f. He has brown hair, green eyes, is 5' 8½" tall and weighs about 135.

CAROL RAY, 33 KENSINGTON, PLEASANT RIDGE, MICH. . . . 17 year-old Carol is very interested in s-f,

UFO's, astronomy, astrology, animals, acting, James Dean, life on other worlds, drawing, science in general and hypnotism. She especially wants to correspond with people born between Feb. 1st and Feb. 18th.

BILL RICHERSON, 404 PARK AVENUE, TARBORO, NORTH CAROLINA. . . . An engineer-announcer with station WCPS in Tarboro, Bill has appeared in The Space Club once or twice before. He liked the results so much that he has asked us to continue to include his listing. To the previous information we must add that he is 6' 3" and another birthday has gone by making him 24.

MISS JO ROBERTSON, C/O EDGAR STORES, P. O. BOX 2372, SALISBURY SOUTHERN RHODESIA. . . . A comparative newcomer to science fiction, Jo has already acquired quite a collection of books. Her hobbies, other than s-f, include studying the breeding of racehorses and playing badminton. She is an accounting machine operator aged 19, has brown eyes and is 5' 5" tall.

DAVID ROLFE, E 3136 11TH AVE., SPOKANE 32, WASH. . . . 16 years old and a sophomore in high school, David is interested in all branches of science, also in playing chess by mail. He hopes to become a part-time computer technician and a part-time science-fiction writer.

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Amazing But True . . .

Prisoners in Nazi concentration camps during the war were found to be almost free of high blood pressure and hardening of the arteries due to their having lived so long on a starvation diet.

Richard Herrick of Massachusetts owes his life to the fact that doctors were able to transplant a healthy kidney from his brother to take the place of his own, which were diseased. During the transition period Herrick was the only man alive with three kidneys and is probably the only person living with another's kidney in his body.



Among cures for lumbago which some sufferers claim actually work are the following: Place two 8-foot asbestos ropes underneath your mattress; place stinging nettles on the affected part; tie a violin string around your waist.

Mr. David Cox of England made himself a set of false teeth from two old aluminium cycle wheels. So impressed was a dental board with his skill that they gave him a new set free.



Frank Saint of Brantford, Ontario cut his third set of teeth at the age of ninety-one. He has never visited a dentist in his life.

An Ontario farmer, Arthur Cooke, has lived entirely upon liquids since he was three years old and runs a 200-acre farm almost single-handed. When an infant he swallowed a saucerful of lye and hasn't been able to eat solid foods since.

Alfred Arnold, a British journalist, was sentenced to death three times, lived almost entirely upon a diet of fruit and vegetables, and wore glasses for the first time at 110. When he died at 112 he was the oldest bachelor in Britain.

A Los Angeles man hiccuped for seven years without stopping and his weight dropped from 135 pounds to 78 pounds during that time.



Test Your Space I. Q.

The death rays described in science-fiction stories were often considered moonshine by the layman until one bright summer day in 1945 when the atomic bomb exploded some obsolete notions. The A-bomb is now old hat in comparison with the best (or worst) that science promises us but the facts leading up to its development are basic to an understanding of the "new physics." An average spaceman should get 15 out of the 20 questions below.

T F

1. Einstein's Unified Field Theory sets forth in one series of mutually consistent equations the physical laws governing gravitation and electromagnetism.
2. Beta rays are particles that carry positive charges and have been identified as the nuclei of helium atoms.
3. The first nuclear chain reaction (fission of uranium isotope, U-235) took place beneath the Stadium at the University of California.
4. Plutonium is an element less fissionable than Uranium.
5. An instrument used to "weigh" atoms is called a mass spectograph.
6. The Lorentz transformation related distances and times observed on moving systems with those observed on systems relatively at rest.
7. Mesons are devoid of internal energy which makes them about 100 times lighter than the combined mass of their constituent particles.
8. Gamma rays are electromagnetic radiations of the same character as X-rays but extend to much higher frequencies.
9. That there is no way to distinguish the motion produced by inertial forces from motion produced by gravitational forces is known as the Principle of Equivalence of Gravitation and Inertia.
10. The French scientist Louis de Broglie first suggested the concept of electrons as a system of waves, and not as individual particles.
11. In any process of radiation the amount of emitted energy divided by the frequency is always equal to e as used in the equation $e=mc^2$.
12. Another French scientist, Antoine Henri Becquerel (1852-1908),

first found that uranium in various states of chemical combination emitted spontaneously an invisible radiation that was capable of effecting a photograph plate and producing ionization of the air.

13. A neutrino is a particle which carries no electrical charge and does not exceed the mass of an electron.

14. Elements containing atoms that have a different atomic number but the same atomic weight are called isotopes.

15. A cyclotron is used to give charged particles very high speeds and a large amount of energy for use in the bombardment of atoms.

16. The First Law of Thermodynamics is sometimes called the Law of Increasing Disorder.

17. Radiant energy is emitted in discontinuous bits or portions termed quanta.

18. The fission process of uranium nuclei was discovered by Marie and Pierre Curie in the late 1890's.

19. Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity was first published in 1905.

20. An instrument of importance in the investigation of radioactive rays and other charged particles is the hypersonic wind tunnel.



Test Your Space I. Q.

ANSWERS

1. True. 2. False. Alpha rays are positively charged particles. 3. False. The laboratory beneath the Stadium at which the first nuclear chain reaction took place is located at the University of Chicago. 4. False. Plutonium is more fissionable than Uranium. 5. True. 6. True. 7. False. Mesons are overloaded with internal energy which makes them about 100 times heavier than the combined mass of their constituent particles. 8. True. 9. True. 10. True. 11. False. The amount of emitted radiant energy divided by the frequency is always equal to h , Planck's constant. 12. True. 13. True. 14. False. Isotopes are those elements which contain atoms with the same atomic number and different atomic weights. 15. True. 16. False. It is the First Law of Thermodynamics that is called the Law of Conservation of Energy. The Second Law, or Law of Entropy, is called the Law of increasing Disorder. 17. True. 18. False. The German physicists Hahn and Strassman discovered the uranium fission process in 1938. 19. True. 20. False. The hypersonic wind tunnel is used for aerodynamic experiments in high-speed flight and serves no function in particle physics. An example of an instrument important in radioactive ray investigation is the cloud chamber.

—Continued from other side

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THE END OF ETERNITY by Isaac Asimov. For description, please see other side. Pub. ed. \$2.50.

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Right now you're in the primitive "downwhen." You're here in the 20th Century on the most VITAL mission of your career. But you can't delay here, Harlan! You've been ordered to board your Time Kettle and...

Why are you hesitating, you FOOL? Is it the girl? Is it the lovely Noys Lambert, with the seductive body of an evil goddess? Better get going! As an Eternal you belong to an inexorable priesthood which forbids romancing with a woman! YOU CAN'T HAVE HER. And, what's more... YOU'VE GOT TO KILL HER!

Hurry, Harlan! That "blaster" you have leveled at her heart will erase Noys Lambert FOREVER! Maybe you DO love her... Maybe you DO want her. So what? It's too late for that! You must kill her RIGHT NOW... OR CAUSE THE END OF ETERNITY!

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